

# **Ecotourism: A Latin American Perspective**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

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All the countries around the world have applied schemes and strategies for economic development throughout the years that have severely degraded their rich natural resources due to the irrational exploitation of nature to achieve growth expectations. The resources that have not been depleted yet are in danger of collapsing if both developing and developed countries do not take immediate action towards its protection. Thus it has become one of the most important issues in the international agenda to foster a sustainable development and prevent the environmental depletion without compromising economic growth. The benefit of protecting the natural resources is imperative because the economies all around the world depend on natural resources for processing products and to provide services.

One of the most profitable industries for economic revenues is Tourism, which in 1990's was recognised together with oil business as one of the world's largest legitimate business for the large amounts of expenditure it involves and the employment it holds. By the year 2000, tourism industry monetary value represented 11% of global GDP<sup>1</sup> and the

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<sup>1</sup> GDP measures the total value for final use of output produced by an economy, by both residents and non-residents. (Todaro, 1997:38)

worldwide travellers totalled 700 million (UNEP Tourism Programme, 2002). Tourism itself is the world's number one employer, since it represents 10 percent of the jobs in the world. Tourists arrivals are predicted to grow in average of 4.1 percent annually, reaching a total of 1.6 billion of tourists by the year 2020 (WTO, 2000). The economic inflows of the industry made it one of the economic strategies of Latin America to alleviate economic constraints of balance of payment deficits<sup>2</sup>, since it represent a considerable source for foreign exchange (Simon, 1997:181). To support the development of tourism governments issue policies to promote its development with benefits such as tax exemptions, free duty imports and 100% foreign ownership (Stonich, 1998:26).

Tourism as a development strategy in Latin America has not been the exception in being a development strategy that brings within depletion of the environment and distortion of the social structures of the destinations. Even though it is a source of foreign currency, its massive use, infrastructure building and lack of planning strategies and regulatory policies have deeply affected the environment and the local population. Environmentally the constructions of mega-resorts and infrastructure provoke forest clearing, landscape alteration, biodiversity loss, pollution of seas and underground spring waters, dumping of wastes on the beaches and air pollution amongst others. Socially tourism provokes a multiplier effect<sup>3</sup> that affects local population changing their lifestyles, unequal distribution of the benefits and the absorption of the costs. In the labour scope, the local community

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<sup>2</sup> Balance of payment deficit means that a country has spent more foreign currency in imports than the earnings of foreign currency from exports, leaving the national economy with a shortage (See The economic history of Latin America since independence / Victor Bulmer-Thomas Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

<sup>3</sup> Multiplier effect is the chain of events that the infrastructure of tourism brings within, creating negative impacts.

often end up with low salary, temporary and unskilled jobs. Regarding to health, polluted drinking water provokes diseases such as cholera, dysentery and hepatitis, whereas sea contamination causes skin problems and ear infections, affecting not only the local population, but also the visitors and the marine natural basin. Furthermore mass tourism often carries with it drugs, alcohol and prostitution to the area and alters the locals' lifestyle and identity.

Popular tourist spots have been degraded due to the mass tourism, beaches have been closed and what was supposed to be a place for recreation has become a place for gambling and crime (Herzog, 2000: 192). More over policies such as foreign ownership provokes repatriation of the profits, leaving the host countries with fewer economic benefits and all the environmental and social costs. Globally the carbon emissions attributed to tourism for flights is about 7 percent of the total world's emissions, besides of the energy used for transportation in the destination and the amount of organic wastes, just to name some (www.unep.org, October 9 2001).

Despite of the stated impacts of tourism, it is seen as a unique tool to create awareness. Proper management that fosters environmental education and awareness would benefit the whole tourism industry relying on the fact that the natural and cultural asset is the industry basis and thus is a necessity for it (Herzog, 2000:186). At the same time the financial benefits of tourism could be used to foster conservation and promote environmental education (UNEP web site, October 9 2001).

The efforts of International Institutions to promote sustainable development have shifted towards one of the more new and apparently promising strategies: greening the

tourism industry towards sustainable practices, being Ecotourism one of the strongest schemes. The United Nations (UN) has seen Ecotourism as an encouraging scheme for economic development for first world countries as a way to promote conservation through education and to obtain foreign exchange inflows, supported by a community based management of the local population. There have been several attempts to implement Ecotourism and understand its processes and consequences in the last decades, however researchers, companies and governments have begun practising Ecotourism without a general consensus about the correct practices, reliable results or correct measurement to achieve the social, environmental and economic benefits expected. Due to the latter the year 2002 has been designated the International Year of Ecotourism (IYE) that will revise the facts and share the experiences and lessons learnt in the Ecotourism projects that have been implemented. Its aim is to foster the development of innovative and correct strategies that truly seek conservation for environment and communities (see appendix 1 for main objectives for IYE). The event of IYE and its worldwide promotion will unchain an industry boom in the next few years, for the efforts to foster and support Ecotourism by the international institutions are considerable and cannot be ignored. The latter will very probably launch a new industry with a huge market niche that must be co-ordinated and controlled, otherwise there exist a high potential for it to cause the same social and environmental impacts than mass tourism, and new unknown ones with unpredictable consequences.

The attempts to shift towards “greening” tourism has made Ecotourism appear as the perfect solution for developing countries problems for its revenues in foreign exchange, sustainable exploitation of new areas, public involvement and environmental awareness and

education. This new approach is a continuum of tourism that goes further than just enjoying the nature or vacationing, it strives to defend and respect the natural areas as well as the communities that inhabit. Unfortunately, the term has been used indiscriminately without a clear understanding of the definition, to describe and promote all kind of activities related to nature or disguise mass tourism with a green flag, having the risk of creating more problems from the possible solution. The political discourse about Ecotourism rise several questions that should be taken into account. Is Ecotourism really understood by the actors and institutions that implement it? What should be the role of civil society within Ecotourism practices? What strategy should be used to attract the “responsible” tourists? How should governments intervene? Is it really beneficial for the communities? What are the correct strategies and procedures to apply it? Who should be responsible for the projects? Which are the social and environmental impacts of Ecotourism?

The aim of this dissertation is to analyse if Ecotourism is beneficial or damaging to the local environment and population. The questions stated above can only be answered if the process of Ecotourism is analysed according to its definition and understanding, industry’s practices, governmental action and local management to conclude then on possible answers. The danger of Ecotourism to become another mass tourism strategy is extremely potential, thus strategies will be proposed with the aim to better achieve the aims of Ecotourism. But in order to try to analyse, the social and environmental impacts of Ecotourism it is necessary to go backwards into the chain of Ecotourism from the basic definitions to the structure of the industry. It would be narrow to evaluate Ecotourism just in the setting or destination, since the effect that causes the local impacts is a set of reactions of prior activities that leads to a final projects and its results.

To follow as many steps and as many actors involved in the process of Ecotourism is crucial to understand the impact at stake. It helps identify in which step of the Ecotourism process the flaw may have occurred, and all the possible variables that may have been affecting the process. In addition moving backward can help to identify if the effect is a direct or indirect <sup>4</sup> impact and where was it may have been done and which actor and/or institution should be responsible for it. In parallel this would permit to work on the development of a strategy that would identify the problem, where it happened and why it happened to successfully tackle the root causes in the proper step of the process. The latter can help understanding the impacts and then achieve the objectives of minimising negative impacts and maximising the positive ones.

The dissertation places Latin America as a developing region suitable for Ecotourism, since it has the comparative advantage of unspoiled natural resources that appeals nature tourists from developing countries (Cater, 1994:69; McCool, 2001:51). At the same time it unites three of the most popular destinations all over the world for nature based tourism, which are Costa Rica, Belize and Ecuador<sup>5</sup>.

The paper will be divided in three main sections, chapter one will focus in the review of the foundations of Ecotourism, from its definition to its stakeholders. In chapter two there will be an analysis of the accountability of the statements and its reality, applying the analysis of the literature on a case study in the Galapagos Island, Ecuador<sup>6</sup> for its importance as an example of both controlled Ecotourism and uncontrolled mass tourism.

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<sup>4</sup> Direct impact refers to the fact that the impact over the environment or local people, from a direct identifiable source. On the other hand indirect impact refers to an impact that has been caused by several prior impact that provoked a cumulative chain which led to the ultimate impact at stake.

<sup>5</sup> The increases in visitation rates from 1990-1999 of 136 percent, 78 percent and 41 percent respectively (Epler, 2002:20).

Lastly, a conclusion based in the case study will be presented with the possible causes of the negative social and environmental impacts and its feasible solutions and, highlighting at the same time, the positive impacts and its benefits.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **THE FOUNDATIONS OF ECOTOURISM**

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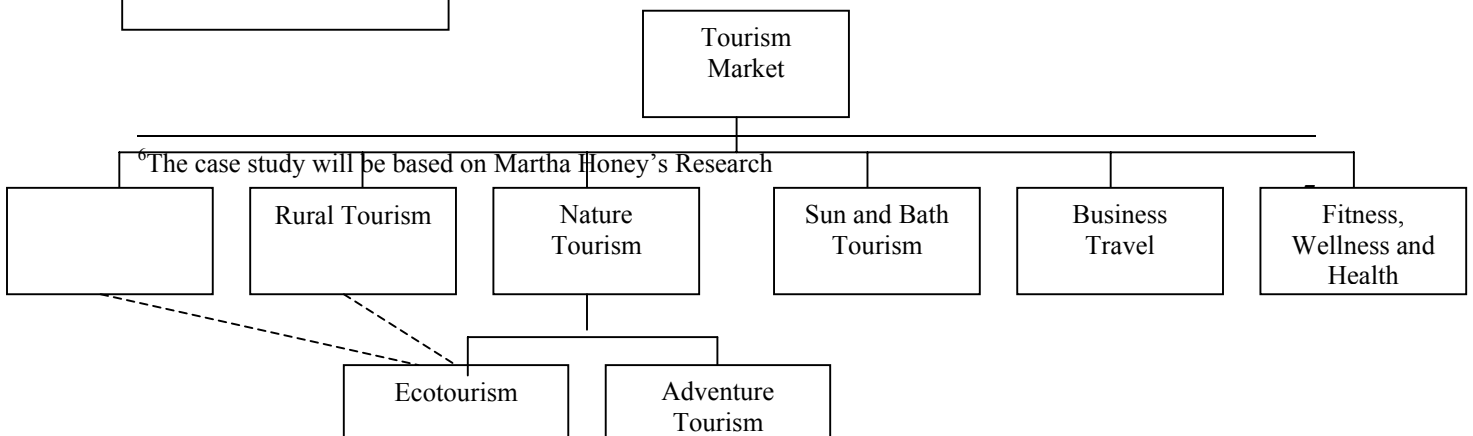
#### ECOTOURISM A DEFINITION:

The UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) stated as early as 1990 that Ecotourism is defined as a nature-based tourism within the market place, but also as concept used as a tool for implementing sustainable development by NGOs, developers and academia.

#### Ecotourism as a market segment:

Even though Ecotourism is small inside the tourism market, it is an industry with rapid growth driven by the same market forces and regulations as the tourism industry. It is mainly seen as a form of nature tourism, such as it happens with adventure tourism, but with the influence of rural and cultural tourism (figure 1). According to the UN the difference between Ecotourism and adventure tourism relies mainly in the facts that the former has the prime motivation of observation and appreciation of nature, whereas the latter is rather the physical activity and challenging activities.

Figure 1 Epler, 2002:11

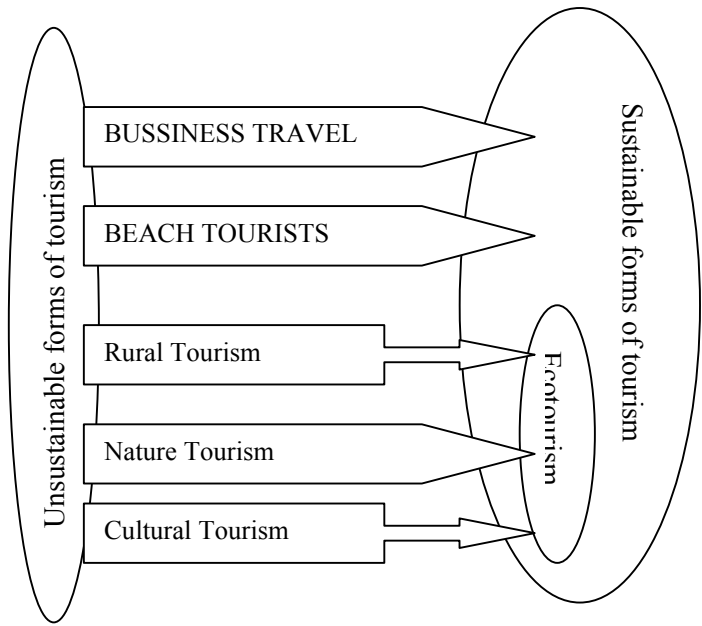


Ecotourism as a concept:

Ecotourism is a sub-component of the area of sustainable tourism, having in mind that all types of tourism should be sustainable. According to this International Institution, Ecotourism is basically a sustainable version of nature tourism with the difference that it includes cultural and rural elements. A general consensus discussed in several conferences has characterised Ecotourism with the following characteristics (Epler, 2002:10):

1. Contribute to conservation of biodiversity
2. Sustain the well being of local people
3. Includes an interpretation/learning experience
4. Involves responsible action on the part of tourists and the tourism industry
5. Is delivered primarily to small groups by small-scale businesses
6. Requires lowest possible consumption of non-renewable resources
7. Stresses local participation, ownership and businesses opportunities, particularly for rural people.

Figure 2  
(Epler , 2002:10)



Ecotourism is understood as a part of sustainable tourism and as a component of nature tourism, rather than an isolated activity or independent industry, therefore it responds to extrinsic and intrinsic motives, environmental impacts, travel profile development business cycle, use levels, key management issues and market opportunities (McCool in Eagles et al, 1995:1). Therefore, to comprehend the market in which Ecotourism is placed and at which it reacts, it involves understanding the industry and the interrelation amongst the actors involved in the process of Ecotourism.

According to The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) (2000, quoting Ceballos-Lascurain, 1993) there is an estimate that nature tourism produces 7 percent of the total world wide travel expenditure. In addition nature travel is increasing at an annual rate between 10-30 percent (TIES, 2000. quoting The World Resource Institute, 1990). The stated statistics demonstrate that nature related tourism is achieving a representative strength and thus is a new industry that cannot be underestimated in its extents and consequences to the environment.

## PRINCIPLES OF ECOTOURISM

Due to the fact that Ecotourism was set as an idea and not as a discipline (Epler, 2002:13), a consensus about the principles has not been thoroughly developed, adding the fact that each destination involves diverse stakeholders with different backgrounds and disciplines. Reality is that each region should create its own principles, guidelines and certification operations based on the international available reference material. The TIES has been following the outcomes of stakeholders' meetings since 1991 to develop a set of

principles, already embraced by NGOs, private sector businesses, governments, academia and local communities, which are:

1. Minimise the negative impacts on nature and culture that can damage a destination
2. Educate the traveller on the importance of conservation
3. Stress the importance of responsible business, which work co-operatively with local authorities and people to meet local needs and deliver conservation benefits
4. Direct revenues to the conservation and management of natural and protected areas
5. Emphasise the need for regional tourism zoning and for visitor management plans designed for either regions or natural areas that are slated to become ecodestinations.
6. Emphasise use of social and environmental baseline studies, as well as long term monitoring programmes, to assess and minimise impacts
7. Strive to maximise economic benefit for the host country, local businesses and communities, particularly people living people living in and adjacent to natural and protected areas.
8. Seek to ensure that tourism development does not exceed the social and environmental limits of acceptable change as determined by researchers in co-operation with local residents
9. Rely on infrastructure that has been developed in harmony with the environment, minimising use of fossil fuels, conserving local plants and wildlife, and blending with the natural and cultural environment (Epler, 2002:13-14).

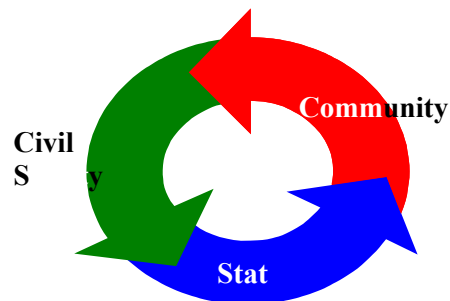
Once that there is an international consensus upon the principles, guidelines can be developed to achieve sustainable development results, but while they are being completely

conceptualised the actors and institutions involved should follow the stated principles and develop according to the case, complementary strategies that fits each region.

## THE ECOTOURISM PROCESS

The tourism industry has been recognised as one of the largest and mores puzzling industries, with rapid economic growth and in the number of travellers. It involves complex networks of services for the tourists, together with the infrastructure that supports it, including private sector tourism businesses, development and conservation NGO networks, consumers, development intermediaries, governmental and intergovernmental organisations and host communities (UNEP, Production and Consumption Unit. March 28, 2002:1). Due to the fact that Ecotourism is seen as part of the tourism industry, the structures and practices within it delineate the Ecotourism process. Three main actors carry on the latter: **civil society, governments and communities** being their practices crucial for implementing beneficial or harmful Ecotourism projects. The process rather than seen as linear, it will have a cyclical approach amongst the three actors with numerous variables interrelated (see figure 3).

### The Ecotourism Process



## Civil Society

The complex industry of tourism will be visualised starting with the actors involved where the Ecotourism services are first hired<sup>7</sup> –mainly the source country. The main parts involved are travel agencies, tour operators, Ecotourism services (airlines, car rental agencies) and private industry (credit card companies, public relations firms, advertising companies, and the media amongst others). After the service is hired, the destination country participates in the Ecotourism process through *inbound* (host country) and *outbound* (source country) *tour operators, accommodation facilities and services* (ecolodges, ground transports, guides and small businesses). At the same time *NGOs, tourist, financial institutions and International Development Agencies* are crucial parts of civil society as a component of the Ecotourism Process.

### *Source Country: The outbound tour operators*

Travel agencies have been the main sales body for traditional tourism, nevertheless regarding Ecotourism the tour operators tackled better the market through direct sales. Paradoxically, Internet services took the lead as the Ecotourism sales body, leaving travel agencies with less opportunity for this particular market niche and opening the web sales channel for tour operators. In 1999, 52 million online travellers used the Internet to search for destinations, with an increase of 54% compared to the previous year (Epler, 2002:34). The services for the source country can and sometimes do work together with the tour

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<sup>7</sup> In the dissertation the foreign visitors will lead the analysis due to its higher percentage as nature tourists travelling from the source country to the host country

operators to provide a complete service, such as air tickets and car rental, supported by agreements with credit card services and promoted by publicity agencies and the media.

#### *Host Country: The inbound tour operators*

The inbound tour operators are mostly the direct contact or representation of the outbound tour operators to manage the specific processes of travels itineraries for the tourists in the destination. The inbound operators have the direct responsibility of implementing the strategies for meeting the Ecotourism standards, being the human resources the main factor to place the operator as competitive in the market place (Epler, 2002:35). Nevertheless the outbound operators have also a great responsibility to work closely with the inbound operator to verify and control that the principles and objectives of Ecotourism are being met. In fact they are the most important component in ensuring high quality Ecotourism for its regulatory role, nevertheless the lack of standards and proper guidelines make the assessment to inbound operators extremely difficult (Honey, 1999:75).

#### *Accommodation and services*

The inbound operators have the responsibility of the tourists, and hence they need special services for accommodation such as ecolodges<sup>8</sup>, that strive to protect the environment and provide a suitable experience for the visitor. The owners of the ecolodges are particular local entrepreneurs rather than big multinationals or big chains. Some times depending on the location and the managers, the ecolodges are co-managed with

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<sup>8</sup> Another accommodation facilities could be suitable for Ecotourism projects; nevertheless ecolodges will be taken as the main ones for its permanent construction and landscape changes.

communities achieving benefits for local people and the lodge (Epler, 2002:37). Ecolodges setting must be still untouched by regular development infrastructure and located in pristine areas to increase their ecological value and the promotion of conservation. The lodges can be rustic or luxurious, but whichever they are, they must respect the surrounding environment, minimise the impacts during the construction and respect the cultural context of the architecture. In addition it must have a sustainable use of the resources – minimise water waste, careful waste disposal and energy production-, work together with the local community, offer educational programmes and contribute to the sustainable development of the area. More over the ecolodges are meant to provide training for the guides and the community, use a majority of local staff, encourage community, provide benefits for local conservation, and work with governments and NGOs, amongst others<sup>9</sup> (Epler, 2002:36).

Due to the remoteness of the destinations, the ecolodges often lack the reach of public services such as roads, hospitals, electricity, education centres, etc. making more difficult for the owners to attract travellers to the site and take advantage of communication networks for promotion. However, this remoteness provoke local services to develop as a support for the Ecotourism destination such as food stands, restaurants, guiding services, vehicle rentals, taxis and recreation services (Epler, 2002:29). These services can foster the development of the area, the promotion of local products and attract tourist's capital into local consumption.

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<sup>9</sup> To find more about the responsibilities of ecolodges, go to Epler Wood, Megan.2002. Ecotourism: Principles, Practices and Policies for Sustainability. UNEP. Page 36.

## *Tourists*

For the whole tourism industry, the tourist is the main actor since is the one who is going to choose the destination and services to be hired. The growing demand for nature related tourism, is a reaction of tourists searching for a new market to satisfy their needs. According to Cater (1994:22), tourism is in essence a fashion industry in the sense that demand and supply forces are strongly influenced by people's perceptions, expectations, attitudes and values, together with the influence of their culture. There exist four sources of social change that influence the dynamics of Ecotourism: dissatisfaction with existing products, growing environmental awareness and cultural sensitivity, realisation by destination regions of the precious resources they possess, both human and natural, and their vulnerability and changing attitudes of developers and tour operators towards Ecotourism (Cater, 1994:31).

Currently, no Ecotourism market research is available, instead there is a general nature tourist profile based on data from destinations such as Costa Rica, Ecuador, Belize, South Africa, Kenya Botswana and Nepal. According to the United Nations data recompilation of the stated countries, the nature tourist market profile is the following (Epler, 2002:22 quoting HLA and ARA Consulting, 1994. Wight 1996a, 1996b).

- Age: 35-45 years old, but it may vary according to costs
- Gender: 50% male and 50% female, nevertheless it varies depending on the activity
- Education: 82% were college graduates
- Composition: 60% preferred to travel in couples, 15% with their family and 13% alone.
- Trip duration: from 8 to 14 days

- Expenditure: The travellers already experienced<sup>10</sup> in nature tourism are willing to spent more then a common tourist, with a 26% with a budget of 1000-1500 US\$.
- Elements of trip: wilderness setting, wildlife viewing, and hiking/trekking
- Motivations for the trip: enjoying nature and to have new experiences and visit new places.

Together with the market profile of the nature tourists, other environmental and social attitudes determine the nature tourist profile, which help identifying the visitors and develop strategies to better understand their behaviours and activities within the Ecotourism context. The environmental attitudes refer to nature attachment and preference for destinations with low level of human presence; ecotourists celebrate conservation measures and are eager to set the environmental behaviours on others. Socially, the nature tourists seek for learning and the associated personal improvement, generally no specific social contact is needed to attain these goals, except for the company of people they may help them understand nature better (McCool in Eagles et al. 1995: 5-6). It is very important to understand the profile of the ecotourist for the Ecotourism strategy assumes that the individual self-reflexivity and commitment will be the driving force to achieve sustainable results.

### *Non Governmental Organisations*

The Non Governmental Organisations (NGO) fostering conservation play a significant role in Ecotourism because they are involved in the process to protect the

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<sup>10</sup> Experienced nature tourist refers to such that has at least experienced one Ecotourism trip.

biodiversity and the environment and to promote sustainable development in the local area. Likewise NGOs are the support for the private sector in developing programmes and strategies to guarantee that, nationally and internationally, that Ecotourism practices are coherent with the principles and that they foster conservation. Currently many local NGOs are also working towards activist movements to foster the conservation of local resources with economic potential for Ecotourism. Within the Ecotourism implementation, NGOs are often present to undertake projects such as training and capacity building initiatives, establish standards and guiding the development of ethical businesses, management of certification programs and training young entrepreneurs worldwide. At the same time, they ought to be working with governments and International Agencies to develop sustainable Ecotourism policies, working with protected area agencies to establish visitor management capacity, as community representatives who lack the political and social rights in policy dialogues (Epler, 2002: 37, 39, 53, 54).

#### *Financial Institutions and International development agencies*

Financially, commercial banks together with international financial agencies and aid institutions support the whole tourism industry (Honey, 1999:33). Particularly it receives funding from conservation organisations and NGOs mostly based in the United States and other developed countries. Regarding Ecotourism, the main source for funding comes from International Development agencies such as the World Bank (WB), European Commission and Inter American Development Bank (IDB), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), German Ministry for Economic Development (GTZ), Norwegian Agency for Development co-operation (NORAD) and Canadian International Development

Agency (CIDA). The stated agencies have strict guidelines towards poverty alleviation, nevertheless in the beginning of the 1990's a small part of the efforts were driven in direction of sustainable development projects such as Ecotourism, mainly through loans and grants (Epler, 2002:49).

## **State**

The governments have the greatest potential to delimit tourism in the sense of promotion, planning, management and regulation, since it is the only actor that can provide long term planning and management through legislation and juridical protection of natural protected areas. Its ability to enforce environmental regulation sets the framework and therefore can assist in minimising the negative impacts in Ecotourism practices. Government policy and planning should be based in the management of the proper guidelines and standards (Wearing, 1999:24). Currently, even though governments are becoming more involved in Ecotourism as an important source of revenues, the guidelines and proper standards to regulate, control and support it are non-existent. Yet, according to Epler (2002:48) there are several starting points to be followed by governments until a general international consensus about the proper ones are developed. These stress the importance on inter ministerial working, multidisciplinary experts, training programmes amongst all the stakeholders involved, transport and communications infrastructure, financial long-term programs, land use and marketing plans, amongst others (see appendix 2). The role of government is imperative to support Ecotourism, it will very much depend on the policies and structures the state determines, if the whole Ecotourism strategy is to be a success or a failure. To follow the UN recommended draft guidelines until an

international consensus develops official ones must be a major concern for local governments, for the potentiality of Ecotourism of causing the same environmental and social problems as mass tourism did, if it is not correctly controlled and regulated.

## **Communities**

The creation of the Community Based Management (CBM) strategy was an answer to the social and environmental negative impacts that mass tourism has caused. At the same time it was an answer to the prior unjust conservation measures- e.g. National Parks- that excluded the community<sup>11</sup> and/or local population from their own land and resources (Duffy, 2002:101). The Community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) and community-based conservation (CBC)<sup>12</sup> (Belsky, 1999:641 quoting Western and Wright, 1994) was the answer from developers to create a strategy that fosters equally conservation and development of remote areas. The empowerment towards the Community based Ecotourism (CBE)<sup>13</sup> has been done mainly to learn how communities have managed their resources throughout the years without depleting them (Belsky, 1999:643). Likewise several issues captured the attention in communities to impulse Ecotourism (Iturri, 1998:45, 46, 47):

- 1) The communities have a close relationship with nature, since they have been using the natural resources as their main source for subsistence. Furthermore nowadays the

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<sup>11</sup> Communities and indigenous communities are different types, since their values, structures, religion, traditions and social situation are different from each other. Nevertheless for the uses of this dissertation, the term community will refer to both indifferently.

<sup>12</sup> The use of CBM, CBC and CBNRM will be indistinct

<sup>13</sup> Epler, 2002:41

communities manage their resources with an economic approach amongst other communities, creating a basis for Ecotourism management.

- 2) Communities have constructed commercial networks amongst them proving their efficiency as administrators. These skills together with constant training can help in achieving a better implementation for Ecotourism.
- 3) The communities have the capacity of managing the projects, which can achieve better results with legal advisers in order to create their own micro-enterprises.

Ecotourism is seen globally as a powerful tool to deliver benefits to local people who are remote from commercial centres without widespread social or environmental destruction (Wearing, 72). It has enough potential to support conservation measures in both the host community and in the visitor, through establishing and sustaining links between the tourism industry, local communities and protected areas. The local population within the area will depend on the environment and social benefits as a result of conservation may have the result of increasing overall standards of living due to the local economic development resulting from the increase visitation of the site. Similarly the environment will need to be protected in order to sustain economically viable tourism (Wearing, 73-74, quoting Ceballos Lascurain, 1990).

According to Epler (2002:41) there can be three main types of CBE: (1) the community owns and manages the enterprise, all community members are employed by the project and they rotate the tasks, allocating the profits in community projects. (2) Family groups or initiatives within communities and (3) joint venture between a community or family and an outside business partner.

Community participation in the Ecotourism process is crucial for a successful implementation of the project since their involvement and performance will dictate the positive benefits for the community and the environment in the project at stake. The CBE strategy promotes the community's participation in decision making and fosters locally managed economic activities, encouraging a better performance for the direct benefits of the area. Ecotourism can increase basic human needs in the communities, by acquiring a good life standard with higher incomes and improvement of public infrastructure -clean water, sanitation and roads. Besides it can also be seen as a motivational tool to improve education levels and participation in decision making processes (Cater, 1996:3).

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE REALITY OF ECOTOURISM**

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#### UNDERSTANDING ECOTOURISM.

The definition that better suits the purpose of this dissertation is that Ecotourism must involve visiting pristine protected areas, in small-scale visits, community based managed, with the aim to educate the visitors, minimising the impacts over the environment. At the same time it should benefit the community, create awareness and raise funds for conservation. All of the above will suit the definition if and only if the correct procedures are applied, with an environmentally sound legal framework and society and communities' commitment. Also, there must be a clear understanding that each case of Ecotourism will greatly vary depending on the region, context, government, etc. creating diverse and complex situations in each different region. It is important to point out that Ecotourism must be seen as a concept that involves principles and definitions, and as a market segment, in which it is situated to participate within the market. Therefore Ecotourism results will be dictated by its use as a tool in project implementation and by the market forces that delineate the industry.

The United Nations places Ecotourism inside traditional tourism in a sustainable way, but the same concept of sustainability has been vaguely defined and many times used as a political discourse rather than as a feasible tool for environmentally sound development. Many sources and actors of the tourism industry have made just "green-washing" strategies as a facade without changing practices of mass tourism, while

Ecotourism should be seen as the engine to transform the industry's damaging practices, rather than just as a new market niche to exploit (Honey, 1999:21).

#### ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE PRINCIPLES OF ECOTOURISM

The principles of Ecotourism lack a profound support of guidelines, strategies and procedures to implement and manage the projects. General guidelines are imperative because the process involves many stakeholders with different context, background and disciplines. Taking into account that the Ecotourism industry is in its infancy is understandable that the proper guidelines have not been implemented, however the consequences and impacts are beginning to take place parallel with the development of the strategies. The complexity and diversity of each case due to the diverse contexts should encourage each region to create their own principles based on the existent general international consensus, the problem is that there still are not any (Epler, 2002:13).

The challenge of implementing sustainable tourism is high, and despite of the use of Ecotourism in the political discourse for greening purposes, very few cases can be found which have accomplished the real Ecotourism principles (McCool, 2001:164). Due to the latter, the international arena should demand, apart from achieving the principles, essential requisites to be compulsory regardless of the region. For example, each Ecotourism project should have an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)<sup>14</sup>, which aims to identify, describe, prioritise, predict, and mitigate the possible environmental and social impacts, presented in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Moreover, it seeks to influence in

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<sup>14</sup> To find out more about EIA see Wathern, Peter. 2001. Environmental Impact Assessment . London. Routledge.

the decision making process and create methods for monitoring the post projects effects. Due to the multidisciplinary approach of EIA, its use within Ecotourism would help to identify adequately the environmental baseline of the area, the local population profile, and the environmental policy, and very possibly predict some of the possible impacts of the project (Wathern, 2001:28,29). At the same time it would avoid post project costs (e.g. health problems), proper compensation measures for the local people and prevention and mitigation strategies for the environmental impacts, just to name some.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ECOTOURISM PROCESS

### **Civil Society**

#### *Tour operators*

The Ecotourism process is the main component to analyse to understand the project and its impacts because it involves many of the actors and institutions that lead and support the industry. For the purposes of this dissertation, the process is seen as a cycle (see figure 3) that involves civil society, state and communities, which could not implement an Ecotourism project without interdependence amongst each other. The process does not have a determined starting point; nevertheless the civil society will be seen as the initial step.

The tourists seek for ecotour services with travel agencies and tour operators, but the main source to investigate is the Internet, since it has become the main sales body for Ecotourism. It is important to revise the authenticity of the ecotour operators, as well as the development of policies and regulatory bodies that should be regulating them. At the same time a strategy is needed to select the responsible ecotourists, due to the fact that the Internet can be accessed by anyone. Internet can be an excellent channel for local people

and communities to promote themselves either directly with the proper training, or through tour operators. It is a clean and cheap way to promote that can reach millions of users, but still there must be special attention in how to promote the destination without losing control of the number of visitors ([www.world-tourism.org](http://www.world-tourism.org)).

Once the service has been hired, the host country has the responsibility to implement the project in an environmentally sound way. As stated before, the outbound tour operator should work closely with the inbound tour operator, but without established guidelines and procedures it becomes very difficult to assess or even regulate themselves (Epler, 2002:35; Honey 1999:75). Currently the only regulatory body for Tour operators is the Tour Operator Initiative (TOI) for Sustainable Tourism Development, launched in March 2000 with 23 voluntarily committed members. The TOI's aim is to develop, together with the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) guidelines and frameworks for sustainability reports for the tour operator sector, being the last draft of "Sustainability Reporting Performance Indicators" from March 2002 ([www.unep.org](http://www.unep.org)).

Economically speaking, Inbound operators must make sure that the cash flow from the activities remains in the host country. The profits of Ecotourism should stay in the destination, but most of the time is either the state capital of the country where the community is, or the origin country where the whole ecotour was hired.

### *Accommodation and services*

The ecolodges and the development of the surrounding infrastructure and services that is developed provoke social and environmental changes around its area of influence, therefore the development of them should be controlled and carefully managed. The construction of lodges and infrastructure must be environmentally sound and the post management should minimise the negative impacts (Epler, 2002:36). In order to attract tourist, the ecolodges must be supported with infrastructure such as roads and water supply to facilitate the access and have sanitary standards. The construction of infrastructure could permit a better promotion of the Ecotourism projects, and promote the efficiency of other activities the community has alternative to Ecotourism –e.g. farming-, with better access to the markets. Similarly, the infrastructure would facilitate access for public services to properly dispose the wastes of the ecolodges that cannot be recycled or reused in sustainable ways. At the same time a proper water supply system would avoid health problems among the local population and the visitors, saving post-project health costs. Moreover, the access to the remote areas could provide the local population with schools and hospitals and rise the life standards of the area. On the other hand the access to until then remote areas and the new economic activities could provoke migration and social tension for the management of the resources.

Locally the current remoteness of some Ecotourism destinations has promoted the creation of small businesses that can encourage the local area development, nevertheless it should be a concern if the development of such facilities is environmentally sound according to Ecotourism objectives. For example, there should be special attention to the supply in food quantity, since the natural resources are used only to the local population

consumption, not to the visitors and the locals. Similarly the introduction of external international food, can provoke that the local products are not consumed and make more difficult the waste disposal. Similarly it must be avoided to create large services facilities in case the market fluctuations do not favour the industry and to avoid further disappointments. It is calculated that in Latin America there are around 4,500 suppliers of Ecotourism with infrastructure for visitors in communities, but the tourist still do not reach all of them because of the lack of promotion and representation of the destination (Iturri, 1998:39).

### *Tourists*

The tourists are the core of existence for the tourism industry, their choices and preferences would dictate the path for the tourism industry. In the past the four S –sun, sea, sand and sex- were the main engine for the tourists to chose a destination, nevertheless the depletion of natural resources and the uncontrolled growth of mass tourism, has made the destinations less attractive. Abiding to the argument of Cater (1994:22) that the industry is mainly directed by the dynamic preferences of the consumer, the new fashion of the market is shifting towards nature tourism. Depending on the destination, its natural and cultural attractions and the perception of it, will the ecotourist be motivated, therefore the ecotourist solely cannot be completely trusted upon minimising social and environmental impacts as the Ecotourism strategy assumes (Duffy, 2002:46). Besides, the tourist preferences will be greatly influenced by publicity and media such as Honey (1999:83) states: “ineffective or insufficient marketing is probably the primary reason why worthy Ecotourism ventures in developing countries fail to attract visitors”. According to Wearing, (1999:108) marketing

needed for Ecotourism is defined as “the development of ecologically sustainable tourism products and the pricing, promotion and distribution of these products, so impact on the physical and cultural environments is minimised, while maintaining some level of profit commensurate with these objectives”. Even if the correct marketing strategy is used to attract responsible travellers or to create awareness amongst the general public, to rely in the individual effort as Ecotourism basis is quite naive because a change in the tourists’ behaviour cannot secure sustainability. They must have training from local guides to inform them about the unwanted negative impacts the ecotourists may have without being conscious of it. However it may be that self-reflexivity could be an engine for environmental behaviour, taking advantage of that responsibility towards action and behavioural change towards the environment, and reduce the need for institutional control over natural resources, facilitating its implementation (Duffy, 2002:22 quoting Smith.1996: 25, 26, 27, 45).

Is important to have clear that the market profile that UN has is from nature tourists, not really ecotourist, nevertheless most of nature tourists would be willing to become loyal customers once they had a chance to stay in an ecolodge and to use guided services ([www.world-tourism.org](http://www.world-tourism.org), April 2002). The profile of the nature tourist portrays a highly educated tourist, truly interested in nature and willing to spend money for the sake of conservation. However, what can assure that other type of less responsible tourists will reach the destinations? A marketing strategy that promotes Ecotourism has the risk to over attract tourists and convert it into mass tourism. On the other hand if the marketing focuses in the actual market profile of current nature tourists the potential market that could educate through Ecotourism would be wasted through discriminatory tourism. Further more the

misuse of Ecotourism in the political discourse and greening strategies has provoked that the real ecotourists get disappointed and be less intellectually curious, socially responsible, environmentally concerned and politically aware than in the past (Honey, 1999:52). Currently, only the environmentally and intellectually curious have access to real ecotourist information, since it involves research and interest from the tourist side, without conforming to what the industry offers. The correct path to take would be a marketing strategy that triggers the interest to research and become a responsible ecotourist, not only to sell tours and make profit regardless of the consequences.

#### *NGO*

NGOs as stated in chapter 1, should have a considerable role in supporting, developing and promoting environmental action towards attaining Ecotourism objectives, however the current performance could be much more improved towards more environmental action. One important reason for the lack of action is that there has been an increase in environmental organisations, but not an improvement in the society activities as a whole. Governments, business sponsorship and donations from concerned public have supported these organisations in the last decades, promoting the increase the number of environmental agencies in the government, private and voluntary sector. Instead of focusing in raising money, the environmental movement should be more concerned in promoting society's participation and involvement. Environmental issues should be much more integrated into society, not as a sector outside it because conservation cannot be achieved through a system of separate organisations managed by environmental groups (Cater, 1994:57, 58, 60).

Institutional mobilisation should not be only international, national mobilisation is crucial for the correct implementation of the Ecotourism strategies. The main functions that could be undertaken are: lobbying national government, provide a forum for Ecotourism concerns, collecting and providing data, provide a focal point for domestic recruitment, assisting in publicity and educational programmes and marketing. At the same time they could lobby to contribute with the formulation of a national Ecotourism plan, engage in fund raising, engaging in national Ecotourism projects assessment, develop codes and guidelines, provide advise and training, work the development of tools to measure and monitor the practices and truly represent the communities involved in the CBM (Weaver, 1998:214).

#### *The financial institutions and the International development agencies*

The financial institutions and the International development agencies are currently just a funding support for conservation projects. These institutions and agencies have been promoting economic globalisation and free trade as well as the removal of barriers. The liberalisation of investment regulations, labour standards and environmental protection has promoted that large firms take advantage regarding investment in the tourism industry, leaving the small local projects with an unequal access to resources and less strengths to compete for funding and infrastructure development (Honey, 1999:34,35). Their role seems to be limited to lend small amount of financial credits to conservation programmes, due to the fact that their main priority is poverty alleviation (Epler, 2002:49). Instead they could support Ecotourism as a strategy to fight poverty and become more a partner for the implementers, probably as financial assessors.

## **State**

Governments have an essential role for the tourism industry, since it is supported by with policies and regulations, infrastructure projects, and many times directs subsidies. Nevertheless as seen in chapter one, Ecotourism has not received the same attention for governments because the lacks of international consensus, national budget prioritising and cut spending (Honey, 1999:87). Regardless of the lack of support, Ecotourism projects have been being implemented based on the existent structures, policies and regulations of the tourism industry without guidelines for government planning for Ecotourism. The actual strategy of Ecotourism does not demand strong structural adjustments drawn from utilitarianism, liberalism and free market principles, it stands for a Main Stream Sustainable Development<sup>15</sup> (MSD), assuming that sustainability can be achieved with the current structures, without challenging the actual economic, political and social frame. It also is very confident in the will of the individual to choose conservation behaviour, where the individual is charged with the responsibility rather than the government or private industry (Duffy, 2002:10).

According to Duffy (2002:2) Ecotourism stands as another concept to legitimise the free market policies favoured by various interest groups favouring a weak sustainability that places profit beforehand and ideas of valuing the environment as an economic resource, because conservation must be financially sustainable. The fact that Ecotourism is

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<sup>15</sup> To find more about MSD go to Adams W M.; Green development: environment and sustainability in the Third World

placed in the structure of tourism industry reflects political nature, because tourism development and its support by governments have been based on a market-oriented perspective to support economic growth. Impacts are likely to happen if strategy remains highly politicised and implemented by governments, private businesses, local communities and NGOs with no deep structural change. The developing countries have had difficulties in implementing other neo-liberal strategies, and Ecotourism if correctly applied, could be the exception. For Ecotourism to work, structural changes must be done in the political scope, which could not be so beneficial for interest groups but that are imperative to achieve conservation goals (Duffy, 2002:11).

Governments with economic and political instability have no long term vision nor resources for planning an adequate environmental legislation, which stays in paper or not as strong and coercive as they should be (Wearing, 1999:25, Weaver, 1998:62). Without macro stability, many less developed countries see the Ecotourism strategy more as a development tool than a conservation one (Weaver, 1998: 63). Further more the low level of development and the tight budget of the developing countries may prevent them to invest in conservation measures that minimise the impacts of the Ecotourism activities and focus their efforts towards other social spending.

The contribution of governments into achieving sustainability in Ecotourism practices is not only creating laws and regulations, but also in spending in conservation programmes and acting as regulatory and coercive body. Environmental policy makers should work closely with the private industry and take into account a wider majority of society including the whole chain of the Ecotourism process (Cater, 1994:60, 63).

Epler (2002:48) mentioned several steps that could be followed until a general consensus about the proper guidelines is developed (see appendix 2). But how can these steps be achieved with economic and political instability? Further more, developing countries always have economic constraints for budget prioritisation, and most of the time conservation issues are weaker than the other social issues in the third world. To create so many agencies, plans, training programs, policies, research, etc. requires a considerable amount of budget and the adequate expertise, which most of the time are scarce in developing countries.

Also, for developing countries' governments to pay the costs for the activity's impacts is truly unfair since most of the visitors come from developed countries. There should be support from the tourism industry and a better support from conservation agencies to absorb the costs and invest in minimisation strategy development (Cater, 1994:78). Nevertheless, as a beginning and depending on each case, the government can help with the minimisation of environmental impacts through control of protected areas, licenses and behavioural restriction. But it must be careful that it does not become a discriminatory type of tourism, over charging the entrance of protected areas would probably cause social discontent and logically will not create environmental consciousness. Many times it excludes the local people and communities to use their own resources and forces them to overuse the ones which they can access (Duffy, 2002:16).

## **Communities**

The almost perfect Ecotourism strategy may be very tricky since it makes many assumptions that could prevent a successful implementation of the projects. It assumes that

the community is homogeneous, without conflicts and enough cohesion to carry the Ecotourism project with a common goal towards protecting the environment. The reality is that communities consist of heterogeneous population, which may be formed by long time residents, migrants or foreigners. Tension for the resource management is very likely to happen in these communities, weakening the cohesive power of the CBE in which the framework relies on. Conflicts within a community complicate the conservation strategy of Ecotourism, and can cause discontent even towards the ecotourists visiting the place (Belsky 1999:658). The Ecotourism strategy also infers the community is fighting for the same goal and that they are willing to manage the project, with the needed knowledge and the will to embrace the proposal instead of their daily activities. In the case the local people accepts the project and the conflicts within the community are solved, they may not have the techniques, resources, support and procedures to deal with it. We must be very careful and objective in analysing if the supposed bottom up and CBE are not other top bottom strategies, since the whole framework and assumptions were made by International Institutions regardless of the community opinion or involvement.

The communities are asked to sacrifice their lifestyle and embrace new activities that disturb their social structures in the name of conservation while the elite and large-scale resorts investments keep on with the environmental destruction. Not surprisingly the majority of the large investors of Ecotourism in the third world countries are foreigners. As a result, foreign investment can push the price of land and property upward beyond the reach of local population. The governmental support for large investments and the lack of support for communities could carry within social inequalities, that would definitely

damage the local population and the decision making process becomes exogenous, and often insensitive to the local needs (Cater, 1994: 73, 75).

The influence of visitors and new economic activities that Ecotourism carries within brings several costs for the community which can be, amongst others: the loss of local traditions, commercialisation of local cultural products, erosion of self worth and undermining of family structures. At the same time is probable to provoke the loss of interest (mainly of the youth) in land custody, create internal fights for Ecotourism benefits and promote crime and adoption of illegal underground economies to serve tourists through prostitution, gambling and drugs (Epler, 2002:38). Nevertheless according to Iturri's, community members proclaim that Ecotourism is not a case for crime and prostitution, but it is rather poverty what provokes it. Through Ecotourism it is possible to offer new economic alternatives that diversify the sources of income, that fosters at the same time community's cohesiveness and environmental conservation. The community members comprehend that their source of income is the pleasure of tourists in enjoying nature, therefore they have incentives to protect their surrounding environment. The culture of the local people is to be paid by Ecotourism, still it should not be seen as a business only for profits, but rather as a tool for cultural and environmental awareness. It is argued that Ecotourism can be a powerful tool to reinforce amongst the community's youth the cultural and traditional values. By working as guides the members of the community learn more about their own culture and appreciate their ancestors' heritage. Further more members of the community sustain that the fact that they get paid to live their daily life, speak their language, wear their traditional costumes and dance their typical dances reinforces the will to preserve their culture. (Iturri, 1998: 13, 17, 18, 28)

Ecotourism inevitably will cause impacts -both positive and negative- since the areas that are often chosen as destinations were previously undisturbed by development, and the new intervention of visitors will cause environmental changes. Socially is inevitable that the new visitors and activities will influences the structures of communities, but it is part of the Ecotourism strategies to minimise them (Iturri, 1998:17). The first step to implement a successful Ecotourism process could be to present the community the idea of the project to evaluate the interest and willingness they may have. If so, then perform a research on the community and the environment that sustains it to have a basis to start with. The latter could be achieved through a Social Impact Assessment (SIA)<sup>16</sup> that is a tool that can help understand the community composition, behaviour and processes. Community involvement must be promoted from the first stage of the decision making process, to the implementation with the proper support of governmental policies and legislation –e.g. land tenancy- and national and International NGOs.

The development and implementation of the correct and fair strategies will determine the community performance in the Ecotourism process. The commitment of the community will largely depend on the distribution of the benefits from the Ecotourism projects. Robust institutional agreements are needed to support a CBM project, because in the CBE strategy is indispensable for success that the local people's rights are not only ought to be respected, but also protected (Duffy, 2002:10). Likewise the communities' values and traditions must be respected understanding that their values and beliefs are based on different prioritisation than ours. To avoid disappointments it is also important to

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<sup>16</sup> SIA is the process of assessing or estimating in advance the social consequences that are likely to follow from specific policy actions or project development. It include all the social and cultural consequences to

motivate the community to continue with other activities apart from Ecotourism, to prevent from depending in a sole activity that is out of their control, since is dictated by market fluctuations, civil society and government

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human populations that alter the way in which people live, work, play, relate to one another, organise to meet their needs and generally cope as members of the society (Vanclay, 1995)

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THE GALAPAGOS ISLAND CASE STUDY**

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The Galapagos Islands case study is a good example of how Ecotourism can be successfully applied following certain strategies in accordance to the case, and also how each project has the permanent potential of turning into mass tourism and cause negative environmental and social impacts in the area at stake. Each destination, local people, government, and context is different, the Galapagos' case is special because it was in the international context since the IXX Century because of Darwin's research and publications. The studies plus the discovery of the high percentage of endemic species, became an engine for conservation measures and international concern. This case study, based on Martha Honey's research, will be helpful to answer the introductory questions of the dissertation about the impacts of Ecotourism, based on the analysis on the Ecotourism process and its accountability.

The Galapagos Islands, located around six hundred miles from the coast of Ecuador, is often referred as the first destination where Ecotourism originated, for 150 years ago tourists from Europe began to visit it as sailors, scientists or adventurers, but in many ways they behaved as ecotourists. Nevertheless from the time that Charles Darwin visited the Galapagos Islands for his study in the "Theory of Evolution" in the IXX century, the impacts of visitors were already seen with the introduction of rats, pigs, goats and other animals destructive for the flora and fauna of the region. Eventually measures were taken for rehabilitation of the islands to slowly reverse the destructive trends. In 1935 the

government authorised the legislation towards conservation for the wildlife, but these were not implemented until 1959. In memorial of Charles Darwin, ninety seven percent of the islands were declared National Park restricting three percent of the already settled area for human habitation. In 1960 The Charles Darwin Foundation was created (based in Quito, with an office in Virginia and a research facility in the Galapagos) supported by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the World Conservation Union (IUCN). 1979 was the year when the Islands were declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site and in 1986 the government declared 50,000 square kilometres of water marine resource reserve to protect the submarine biodiversity within the archipelago and a zone of fifteen nautical miles around the islands.

The government has ran the national parks for decades with international financial support through the Charles Darwin Biological research station and it had managed to maintain a harmonic relation in scientific research, protection, educational programmes, and breeding of endangered tortoises and land iguanas. It was until the 1980's that the Ecuadorian government began to face different challenges in the island's management. The past remoteness of the islands helped avoiding the massive waves of visitors, where ships arrived only once in three months. The amount of visitors increased after a US military base in the island of Baltra was reconstructed and commercial air links were settled. As an inevitable chain reaction, a tourism infrastructure within the islands was eventually built.

Ecotourism was already practised since the 1960's in the islands, with two Ecuadorian inbound tour operators based in Quito, working together with an American outbound operator. The number of vessels was small, two cruise boats, twelve passenger

sailing vessel and a sixty-passenger luxury liner. At the same time the companies worked very closely with the Darwin station and the National Park. During the 1970's tourism infrastructure grew slowly, but from 1974 to 1980 it had a boom that almost double folded the amount of visitors (see table 1).

Table 1 (Honey, 1999:104)

<b>The Galapagos Islands' Tourism Growth: Visitors to Galapagos National Park</b>									
	Number of Visitors (in Thousands)								
	1972	1975	1979	1985	1989	1990	1993	1994	1996
Foreigners	6.7	7	10	12	27	26	37	41	46
Nationals	0.1	0	2	6	15	15	10	13	16
Total	6.8	7	12	18	42	41	47	54	62

The number of vessels increased from thirteen to forty two and as the Ecotourism industry expanded the ownership changed from long term island residents who did not have the needed marketing skills or the foreign language knowledge, to foreign owned enterprises. Since 1979 the number of tourist has more than fivefolded, mainly because of the construction of a second airport on San Cristobal Island. At the same time the structural adjustment<sup>17</sup> that Ecuador embraced in the 1980's and the political discourse about Ecotourism, brought within a huge amount of tourism investment with new vessels, hotels

<sup>17</sup> The structural adjustment included foreign direct investment liberalisation.

and companies. The tour operators and the foreign owned floating hotels represents the major legal activity and they are a strong economic and political influence for the islands<sup>18</sup>.

By the 1990's two main local companies offered quality Ecotourism services, but they became constantly threatened by other non-island companies which had responded to the growing international market by offering more comfort and luxury. By the late 1990's the islands had eighty to ninety registered yachts, cabin cruisers, sailing vessels and day boats, and two main tendencies had established in the island. The first one was low budget, higher volume conventional sun and beach land based tourism via on land hotels and day boats. The second was towards upscale, lower density Ecotourism aboard luxury tour boats or floating hotels, which have less effect on the ecosystem. The floating hotels -mainly owned by out-islanders- often carried well-run nature tourism, but there was no benefit for the local communities. The tourist spent most of the time in the boats and just a few hours on the island, where they could buy souvenirs from the local people. Local residents did not have enough capital to construct luxury boats, thus very little is managed by the locals. They can only afford modest vessels, since capital intensive companies that buy permits and can afford more luxurious vessels had beaten them. The latter provoked the emergence of poorly organised and unregulated day cruises and on land hotels mainly for national tourists and low budget foreign tourists as a response of the local community to obtain benefits from nature tourism. The uncontrolled growth and low investment of the local enterprises caused more damage than benefits to the ecosystem. In addition the constant economic crises of Ecuador had caused the decline on national visitors, and those who

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<sup>18</sup> The lobbying of the tour operators and investors is represented by The Ecuadorian Ecotourism Association (ASEC), Association of Galapagos Tour operators (ASOGAS) and The International Galapagos Tour

could afford a visit to the Islands tended to hire the non-local services. By 1997, eighty percent of the islands' population lived from tourism, and represented sixty percent of the total tourism income for Ecuadorian government from the vessels, hotels, National Park's entrance fees and the airlines. Nevertheless mainly the on land hotels and National Parks were the ones that left revenue for conservation in the islands, while the others contributed to off-island profits, either in Quito or abroad.

The overall contribution of the whole industry has been beneficial for the sake of conservation, since all of the stakeholders have realised that their source of income is the environmental basin of the island. A good number of tour operators and guides work closely with the park and the research station to localise illegal fishing and campsites. The National Park have strict rules, controlling all visitors and charging a considerable fee for entrance –approximately 100 US\$<sup>19</sup>. Nevertheless the tourist awareness has been decreasing since as visitor numbers increased, there is not enough trained guidance to provide environmental education. The tourism boom has brought less concerned visitors to the islands, who are more worried about comfort and luxury than in conservation. The increase in the number of tourists made competition tougher, what caused that some of the companies took non-environmentally friendly short cut strategies like dumping wastes and sewage directly into the ocean. As well, the huge amount of transportation that arrives to the island carries within alien species that endanger the survival of fragile endemic species.

Politically one of the most worrying issues is the uncontrolled rapid increase in human arrivals including colonists, fishermen, poachers and job seekers with neither

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Operators Association (IGTOA).

concern nor knowledge of the Islands' fragility. The population was relatively low in the 1960's consisting mainly of self-subsistent farmers and fishermen who worked for the Charles Darwin Biological Research Station. However in the 1980's, the new economic activities provoked an immigration wave. Since then the population growth has been around six to ten percent annually, all confined in the three percent of territory that is not declared as National Park and under the marine reserve's restrictions. Problems such as drinking water, sewage, waste disposal, electricity, etc. as well as the demand for fishing rights, farming lands and timber has become a major problem for the Ecuadorian government.

The stress of the growing population has had confrontations with the government, particularly regarding fishing practices in the marine reserve. The government tries to control the over exploitation by using traditional methods, seasoning, and permits, but despite of, the over fishing keeps happening. This has been caused because of the weak governmental management and the lack of law enforcement that permits local fishermen to collude with foreigners to practice illegal fishing. The conflicts have provoked social tension and other illegal activities to take place as slaughtering of tortoises, fires in reserves and public aggressive manifestations. The internal organised activism provoked international concern, and the UNESCO declared that the Galapagos would be designated a world heritage Site in Danger if the Ecuadorian government did not perform an effective conservation programme that would protect the environment and reduce social conflicts. The national and international pressure provoked that the government developed the Special Law for the conservation of the Galapagos with reforms to protect the Galapagos

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<sup>19</sup> This figure is from 1999.

Islands. In April 1997, a governmental decree recognised the conservation of the Galapagos Islands a national priority. This was accompanied by reforms to control fishing, immigration and introduced species. Also the Permanent Galapagos Commission was created with representatives of each actor and institution involved<sup>20</sup> having the Biological Research Centre as an advisor. Besides the revenues for the Parks' fees were redistributed evenly amongst conservation of the parks and well being of the local habitants. Nevertheless a flaw of the Special Law is that it has no ceiling for number of tourists that can visit the islands, but the permanent residents were given the exclusive rights for future tourism opportunities. As it can be seen, regardless of the problems and impacts of the number of tourists visiting the islands, the shift in the Galapagos seems to have moved towards a well regulated Ecotourism, limited fishing by local residents, controlled immigration, and increased resources for both the resident community and conservation (Honey, 1999:101-131).

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<sup>20</sup> Conservation groups, tourism industry, various social sectors, industrialists, environmental authorities and representatives of national and international organisations.

## CONCLUSIONS

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The case of the Galapagos Islands is a good example in understanding how the actors and institutions' roles within the Ecotourism process, dictated and will decide in the future, the performance of the Ecotourism projects. In the early years of the project the low population, remoteness of the islands and the scarcity of public transport to the islands maintained an environmentally sound balance amongst the visitors, the government and local population. The understanding of Ecotourism was considerable, even though it did not even have a definition, principles or guidelines for Ecotourism projects, since they just began to develop in the international arena in the 1990's. Darwin's studies and publications, plus the international attention and the importance endemic biodiversity discovered were the main facts that provoked Ecotourism in the islands to function in a controlled and sound manner. The number of visitors was in small-scale and only one vessel came every three months to the pristine area, the tourists were concerned about nature and conservation and eager to learn about the Galapagos Islands. The locals were involved with the Research Station, and they had alternative activities such as self-sustained farming and fishing. At the same time the government declared most of the islands –ninety-seven percent- a National park and the exclusion of human presence from the protected area, at the time it was not an issue for the remaining three percent was already settled, the population was low there was no social tension for resource access. Nevertheless after the Ecotourism boom appeared from the 1980's the balance amongst environment and society began to breakdown.

In the 1980's the airports' construction provoked an uncontrolled increase in the number of visitors, tour operators, infrastructure development and immigration. The new visitors were more interested in having a nice holiday than in conservation issues, demonstrating that the self-reflexivity as the base for behavioural change can not be taken as a base for the Ecotourism strategy. The holiday seekers very probably do not have the time nor the intention to make research to understand what Ecotourism stands for, and evidently the tour operators were not committed in informing them or even implementing real Ecotourism measures. At the beginning of the project, the first tour operators were concerned about offering true Ecotourism with support from the Research Centre, working with the modest infrastructure and the controlled amount of visitors. Nevertheless after the 1980's Ecotourism boom, the investment in new ecotours companies grew rapidly and uncontrolled, being the majority of the investors off-islanders and foreign investors looking more for profits than for environmental protection. This fact demonstrated the importance of the commitment of tour operator in the Ecotourism development, since they are the direct contact with the tourist that hire the services into the islands. They were responsible for informing the tourists about the destination and to hire the vessel companies to give them services. Apparently, the tour operators and the vessels' companies did not have a true commitment towards the environment and were fostered by the government policies to promote tourism investment in the market liberalisation process. It was until the Special Law was created that the government became more aware and began to have more control over this issue. The law did not affected the outbound tour operators, nevertheless it created tighter political ecology for floating hotels for standards of quality Ecotourism and environmental protection (Honey, 1999:122).

Regarding the accommodation services, the luxury floating hotels did not bring economic benefits to the local population, neither the permanent residents nor the immigrants. The accommodation services, according to the UN (Epler, 2002:37) strives for local ownership and management, however the liberalisation measures that Ecuador embraced in the 1980's, left the locals without enough resources to compete with the luxury vessels and the political power of the investing companies. The response of the locals on attracting cheaper tourism via on land hotels and day boats was not beneficial for the islands' ecosystem, but was logical reaction to the lack of tourism benefits. At the same time the country's economic constraints lowered the domestic tourism, leaving the islanders without even less opportunities of acquiring benefits from Ecotourism. The latter left the locals with fewer options for surviving, provoking the emergence of illegal activities as an alternative way to obtain income, mainly in the fishing sector. The exclusion of the Galapagos population in the decision making about the marine reserves promoted the creation of illegal commercial fishing and social conflicts between the government and the local population. The emergence of illegal alternatives could have been avoided if the Ecotourism strategy had benefited the locals as much as the off-islanders. However, after the social conflicts the government comprehended the importance of including the local population into the Ecotourism industry giving the exclusive rights to permanent residents for future tourism opportunities and promoting the locally based tourism through the Special Law (Honey, 1999:122).

The local NGOs and organised groups have been strong in lobbying the government to solve conservation issues with social justice, which demonstrates its importance as a political pressure. However the supposed activities of NGOs stated by the

literature has only been done partially by the Charles Darwin Research Centre, while the other conservation groups just played a major role in social activism. Even if the complement of both demonstrated to have an influence over governmental actions, their role should be broadened to achieve the functions recommended by Weaver (1988:14) and Epler (2002:37, 39, 53, 54). Regarding the International Agencies, their role has been mainly of funding and dictating top-down strategies rather than working in association with the Ecuadorian government, strengthening the point that International support should go further than just funding projects. On the other hand, its interesting to see the influence that the UNESCO had in pressuring the Ecuadorian government to issue the Special Law and improving its conservation strategies, demonstrating the power of both the national and international pressure towards governmental action.

The state took conservation measures since the beginning of the project by creating the National Park and the marine reserve, nevertheless after the structural adjustment, the uncontrolled growth in foreign investment, number of visitors and immigration brought new unpredictable challenges. The governmental policies and regulations have not been focused towards the environmental protection, instead they promoted the previous sound Ecotourism to turn into a nature mass tourism. These was the effect of not controlling the ceilings in the number of tourists, the investment on vessels and its regulation and of neglecting the local population form benefiting from the Ecotourism activities. After the Ecotourism boom, the activities became more profit oriented than environmentally, influenced also by the fact that the structural adjustment and constrains in the economy urged the country for foreign exchange. The government revenues from the islands became dependent on tourism, - around 80 percent lives from it- leaving the island economy

without diversification of activities and vulnerable to changes in the industry and market fluctuations. Ironically, the only profits kept in the islands were mainly via the cheap oriented on land hotels and the National Park's fee entrance, suggesting that neither the government nor the tour operators were using the correct strategies to avoid repatriation of profits.

The local people that inhabit the island were completely heterogeneous, mainly formed by a few long time residents and a majority of immigrants and thus ancient culture was not a main characteristic of the inhabitants. This fact excludes the issue of the cultural component of Ecotourism, nevertheless the local based management should have been present in the Galapagos Islands' project. After the boom the priorities of the islands changed towards free market, and thus the role of the locals changed from self-sustained farming and fishing to focusing to the tourism sector. This economic activity brought new opportunities and better standards of living, but the issue is the conflict for resource access between the immigrants and the long time residents (Honey, 199:125). The Special Law is an attempt to balance the local people opportunities and the off-island investors, in order to promote the local development without leaving the residents excluded from the benefits. The riots caused by the illegal activities demonstrates the unjust top-down structure of the growth of the tourism industry in the islands demonstrating that the lack of cohesion is a major problems for achieving environmental goals, since there is no common goal nor the will to implement it. The local people should be involved in the decision processes from the beginning of the project and constantly supported by the government to promote local development with diverse activities for the population and stop the dependency in the tourism market fluctuations.

As it can be seen all the stakeholders in the Ecotourism process are interdependent and they cannot be treated as isolated facts. The case of the Galapagos is important to portray how each Ecotourism project will be different depending on the context, place, government, culture and its reaction towards international. At the same time it shows how Ecotourism can successfully work towards conservation if it sticks to the Ecotourism principles and focuses towards environment as the first priority and being very careful not to turn it into a development strategy. The government should intervene as policy makers with sound legislation, institutional support and coercive action for environmental crimes. At the same time it should create regulatory bodies to control tour operators and the promotion of the ecotours, put ceilings in the number of visitors and focus in the development of the local people to avoid social conflicts to keep the locals with a common focus towards conservation. The Special Law should be improved and broadened to cover as much issues of the Ecotourism process as possible and effectively implement it instead on being kept as legislation.

All the stakeholders in the Ecotourism process in the Galapagos Islands are responsible for the success or failure of the projects, the civil society should take the behavioural change and commitment towards environmental protection, but without wholly relying in self-reflexivity as the main support for the Ecotourism strategy. Fortunately tour operators are already realising that they depend on the environment's health for their own existence. They must develop the correct strategy to correctly inform the tourists about the Galapagos Island, and help the holiday seekers change their behaviour towards the environment. The latter should be done with governmental regulation, infrastructure and

policies that promote conservation and respect for nature, controlling at the same time immigration, visitors and off-island investment. The local people commitment, will depend on the distribution of benefits, hopefully after the Special Law things will shift towards more benefits from Ecotourism. Nevertheless the local people, including the immigrants must have the commitment and awareness of the importance of environmental protection for their own sake, because their performance will at the end reflect the local development and its benefits. The three components of the process, wherever it is implemented, must be committed, support each other and shift towards conservation behaviour in order to obtain environmental protection, local development and environmental education. A sound implementation based in the local context, with the correct strategies, legal framework and society commitment would avoid that Ecotourism at the end provoke the same negative environmental and social impacts as mass tourism.

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## APPENDIX 1

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### OBJECTIVES OF IYE

- 1) To open a wide review on the potential contribution of Ecotourism to sustainable development and to conservation of biodiversity
- 2) To exchange information on good practice and lessons in the sustainable planning, development, managing and marketing of Ecotourism
- 3) To advance in the knowledge of the social, economic and environmental impacts of Ecotourism
- 4) To assess the effectiveness of regulatory mechanisms and voluntary schemes for monitoring and controlling the impacts of Ecotourism.
- 5) To review experiences and lessons learned on the participation of local communities and indigenous people in Ecotourism projects and businesses
- 6) To strengthen the capacity of governments, the private sector and NGOs to effectively use Ecotourism as a tool for sustainable development
- 7) To find ways to encourage a more responsible behaviour by all those acting in the field of Ecotourism, including public sector officials, private businesses people and their employees, and the tourists themselves.
- 8) To define new areas for international and inter-stakeholder collaboration with a view to contributing to the sustainable development and management of Ecotourism throughout the world. (UNEP Manual for the International Year of Ecotourism 2002, p2)

## APPENDIX 2

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### STARTING POINTS FOR GOVERNMENT ECOTOURISM PROGRAMME.

- Establish an inter-ministerial working group that combines expertise of Ministries of Tourism, Environment and the agency or agencies charged with rural development, natural resources or park authority.
- Empower and fund a secretariat of experts that work in the field of natural resource management, community development and tourism.
- Develop a participatory planning programme that involves stakeholders from throughout the region or the country, including rural and indigenous communities.
- Establish objectives for a programme based on stakeholder input, such as increased rural development, increased budgets for management for protected areas, and better management of visitors in fragile areas.
- Review transportation corridors, trail systems, small-scale non-commercial river transportation systems, small aircraft access and other infrastructure necessary to develop Ecotourism. Develop a transportation plan that facilitates good Ecotourism itineraries; stresses low environmental impact, low energy use, visitor safety and scenic qualities; and provides quality visitor information.
- Develop both policies to meet objectives and budgetary mechanisms to fund them.
- Develop a visitor information programme and niche marketing plan
- Develop a long-term community training programme to develop community participation in Ecotourism development.

- Establish biological and social carrying capacity benchmarks through research that establishes long-term monitoring of tourism impacts
- Develop finance mechanisms for the development through university research programmes on issues of ethical delivery of Ecotourism products, certification and visitor management plans
- Develop land-use planning capacity in local municipalities through exposure to the benefits of zoning and regulatory techniques. Limit dense development in buffer zones of protected lands and other important Ecotourism attractions (Epler, 2002: 48).

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