RESEARCH NOTES AND REPORTS

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• Research Note

A Framework for Ecotourism

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Tourism is one of the world's largest industry sectors (WTO 1991; WTTC 1993); and its environmental management issues are relatively little studied (Buckley and Pannell 1989; Butler 1991; Westcott and Molinski 1993; WTTERC 1993). Ecotourism is arguably its fastest growing subsector (Matthews 1993), but poorly defined.

There are four main links between tourism and environment: components of the natural environment as the basis for a marketable tourism attraction or product; management of tourism operations so as to minimize or reduce their environmental impacts; economic or material contribution of tourism to conservation, either directly or indirectly; and attitude of tourists towards the environment and environmental education of clients by tourist operators. Therefore, there are environmental aspects to every major component of tourism business: products and markets, management, money, and people.

Environmental organizations have generally insisted that only tourism that is nature-based, sustainably-managed, conservation-supporting, and environmentally-educated (Figure 1) should be described as ecotourism (Baez and Rovinski 1992; Boo 1990; Ceballos-Lascurain 1992; Eber 1992; EAIPR 1992; Figgiss 1993; Lee and Snepenger 1992, Richardson 1993a, 1993b; Swanson 1992; Young 1992; Young and Wearing 1993; Ziffer 1989).

Industry and government, however, focus more on the product aspect, often treating ecotourism as effectively synonymous with nature-based tourism. Environmental management aspects are generally considered under rubrics such as sustainable, ecologically sustainable, environmentally appropriate, or environmentally responsible tourism (Ashworth and Goodall 1990; Australia 1991, 1992, 1993; British Airways 1992; British Airways Holidays 1993; Buckley 1991; Butler and Waldbrook 1991; English Tourist Board...
Table 1. Ecotourism Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry Subsector Descriptor</th>
<th>Nature-Based Tourism</th>
<th>Sustainably-Run Tourism</th>
<th>Conservation-Supporting Tourism</th>
<th>Environmentally-Aware Tourism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aspect of Tourism Industry</td>
<td>product, attraction</td>
<td>operations, management</td>
<td>revenue, purchasing</td>
<td>behavior, attitude (individual tourist); education, ethic (service provider)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Names in Common Use</td>
<td>ecotourism, natural-areas tourism, green tourism</td>
<td>ecologically sustainable tourism, environmentally responsible tourism</td>
<td>includes NGO's trusts, societies, firms</td>
<td>[ecotourism]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinguishing Characteristics</td>
<td>aspect or component of natural environment is principal attraction to destination</td>
<td>deliberate steps taken to reduce environmental impacts and improve environmental management performance</td>
<td>revenue or activities contribute to environmental conservation organizations or activities</td>
<td>attitude to nature, deliberate behavior to minimize impacts (individual tourists); education or regulation of clients to change attitudes and/or behavior (tourism service provider)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry Subsector</th>
<th>Nature-Based Tourism</th>
<th>Sustainably-Run Tourism</th>
<th>Conservation-Supporting Tourism</th>
<th>Environmentally-Aware Tourism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environmental Issues</strong></td>
<td>impacts on conservation values: ecological carrying capacity</td>
<td>a. energy efficiency, greenhouse effect, air and water pollution</td>
<td>funding for conservation through:</td>
<td>a. impacts on conservation values: ecological carrying capacities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b. resource use, disposables and consumables, recycling, sewage and sullage</td>
<td>b. direct payment to NGOs in country-of-origin</td>
<td>b. crossover from tourism to other aspects of individual behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Industry Subsector Affected</strong></td>
<td>resort owners, safari and tour operators</td>
<td>resort owners, airlines, bus companies, hotel chains, tour operators</td>
<td>specialist ecotourism companies, not-for-profit organizations</td>
<td>specialist ecotourism companies, not-for-profit organizations, individual tourists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Size and Growth</strong></td>
<td>medium size, growing rapidly</td>
<td>most of the industry, stable size</td>
<td>small subsector, growing slowly</td>
<td>currently small, growing rapidly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Industry Component</strong></td>
<td>destination, marketing</td>
<td>operations, management</td>
<td>purchasing, profits</td>
<td>educational programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aspects of Corporate Operations Involved</strong></td>
<td>a. green marketing</td>
<td>a. client expectations</td>
<td>a. corporate structure, shareholders’ priorities</td>
<td>a. client expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. access to land</td>
<td>b. energy conservation</td>
<td>b. niche marketing, conservation funding as sales tool</td>
<td>b. client relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. impacts on revenue: recreational succession, recreational carrying capacity</td>
<td>c. waste management</td>
<td>c. sourcing labor supplies in country of destination</td>
<td>c. niche marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>d. interaction with health and safety requirements</td>
<td></td>
<td>d. education programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corporate Environmental Management Tools</strong></td>
<td>a. modifying client behavior; e.g. by experienced guides, leaders, or through group ethic</td>
<td>a. client education</td>
<td>a. marketing strategies</td>
<td>a. modifying client behavior, e.g. by guides, education programmes, conditions on tour package, or group ethic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b. environmental and energy audits</td>
<td>b. purchasing and employment policies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c. improve technologies</td>
<td></td>
<td>a. interpretive and instructional signs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy Options</strong></td>
<td>a. education of tourists</td>
<td>a. environmental legislation</td>
<td>a. country of origin: none required</td>
<td>a. in-flight videos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. hardening of environment</td>
<td>b. energy prices</td>
<td>b. country of destination: fees and taxes; local-content requirements for purchasing and employment; limits on foreign ownership</td>
<td>c. compulsory (examined) education programs as per condition</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>c. limiting numbers</td>
<td>c. industry codes of practice</td>
<td></td>
<td>d. optional displays etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. industry codes of practice</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Information Needs</strong></td>
<td>quantitative measurement of impacts of specific activities by known numbers of people, on specific ecosystems at known times of year</td>
<td>a. actual impacts of major travel and accommodational operators</td>
<td>a. total and proportional revenue contributions from individual operators</td>
<td>quantitative measurement of impacts by tourists with different attitudes and or subjected to different education programs</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b. potential to reduce such impacts</td>
<td>b. size of subsector</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c. costs of such reduction</td>
<td>c. direct and indirect financial flows to and from countries of destination</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>d. client expectations and flexibility</td>
<td>d. actual effects on conservation</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
A precise definition of ecotourism is perhaps unnecessary unless the term is to be used in legal or administrative documents, such as planning and development control instruments or grant guidelines for funding agencies. Everyone involved in tourism has to make decisions related to environmental issues, however, even if the connection is indirect. Most decisions rely on information, so it is important to be able to identify critical issues, decisions, tools and information needs. This is being attempted in Table 1, using the framework outlined earlier—that is, nature-based products and markets, sustainable management to minimize impacts, financial support for conservation, and environmental attitudes and education of individual people.

The framework (Table 1) is clearly only one of many possibilities, and could be expanded and elaborated indefinitely. It does, however, integrate the various themes which have been raised in previous discussions of tourism, environment, and ecotourism. Much of this applies across broad segments of the tourism industry, including ecotourism.

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