

## DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE ECOTOURISM: A RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE IN DESTINATIONS OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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### ABSTRACT

*Recent innovations in the ecotourism industry include the idea of research ecotourism, which enables visitors to conduct studies in designated natural areas, often in developing countries. This study aims to analyse a case study from Indonesia in order to identify the nature and causes of the socio-cultural impacts of this kind of ecotourism. The favourable socio-cultural benefits experienced by host communities and the irregular nature of economic gains may be compared to the altruistic surplus theory of individual identification of group advantages. Ecotourism may be useful in similar contexts, as studies have shown that ecotourist characteristics influence hosts' attitudes towards visitors.*

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**Keywords:** Ecotourism, Destinations, Developing Countries, Impacts.

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### Introduction

Many nations are beginning to see tourism as a potential source of revenue because to the widespread infrastructure it requires and the impact it has on many nations' communities, governments, and cultures. As an example, and the amount of money earned from international tourism increased from 1,042 billion to \$1.075 billion. According to Mexico's ministry of tourism, the country's 2012 revenue from overseas visitors totaled 12.739 million dollars. Mexico is one of Latin America's most popular tourist destinations, drawing 23,403,000 international visitors in 2012. On the other hand, 3,8% of all international tourists to Africa went to Kenya in 2012, with 1,985,253 visitors.

Similarly, there are growing numbers of people who are concerned about the main argument against mass tourism is that, despite its seeming advantages, it essentially destroys the same elements that attract so many people. Thus, in today's more linked world, ecotourism and other developing types of sustainable tourism have become quite popular. An estimated 10-15% growth rate places it among the fastest-growing tourism industry. Emerging countries like Kenya and Mexico have recently begun embracing ecotourism, despite its sluggish, inert, and problem-ridden history.

Ecotourism is seen by developing countries as a win-win: it protects natural resources while improving the health, education, and income of locals. An in-depth and multi-faceted definition is that ecotourism is a kind of vacationing that is influenced by the local indigenous peoples' and the environment. Ecotourists strive to avoid poaching animals and natural resources when they visit less developed regions, and they do so with an attitude of respect, engagement, and sensitivity. In addition to supporting local businesses, they make an effort to protect the areas they visit. Whether ecotourism accomplishes its noble aims is, however, an open question. There is a school of thought that claims that empirical evidence of ecotourism is lacking. Still, I'm confused. Since ecotourism has been booming in recent years, some may ask why there are still low-income neighbourhoods next to popular attractions. Why is this happening, given the many negative ecological effects of ecotourism that make it hard to maintain protected areas? The capacity and development plans of the participating countries to foster ecotourism sustainably are brought to light by all of the above issues. Few topics pertaining to tourism are as controversial and polarising as ecotourism.

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This study aims to address both a theoretical and an empirical problem in the field of research. Despite the lack of consensus on its definition, the topic of ecotourism has received an outsized amount of attention from academics. Environmental tourism in developing countries, however, seems to have been ineffective, according to the available evidence.<sup>3</sup> Although prior efforts are not entirely disregarded, the writers do acknowledge and address long-standing mistakes that have resulted from negligence or carelessness. The idea behind this is that we should learn from our failures rather than burying them and hoping for the best. In their thorough examination of the idea, the authors make the well-reasoned case that developing countries cannot sustainably expand ecotourism due to their lack of policymaking capacity.

### Literature Review

**Wondirad et al. (2020).** Professionals in the field and academics alike have long lauded ecotourism for the positive impact it has on both sustainable development and the preservation of natural habitats. However, others have questioned the veracity of the claims that this form of tourism may aid green causes. One of the many reasons given in the literature as a reason ecotourism doesn't work is because stakeholders aren't involved enough. Drawing on ideas of stakeholders, cooperation, and the triple bottom line, this study analyses how stakeholder relationships aid in ecotourism's long-term viability. The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with stakeholders and used a focus group technique as part of their exploratory study plan from 2016 to 2018. According to the findings, ecotourism stakeholders aren't cooperating very well. Natural resources in Southern Ethiopia are being rapidly depleted due to ecotourism, which is having little to no economic effect on the local community. Therefore, ecotourism suffers and communities and ecosystems are endangered when locals aren't given a voice and encouraged to participate, particularly in underserved and faraway places.

**Chan et al. (2013).** An significant problem that has arisen in countries is the need for destination planning that fairly maximises benefits to local residents while limiting negative repercussions. Many feel that the old way of establishing protected areas, called fortress conservation, is unethical, wasteful, and doesn't put the needs of the surrounding community first (Lai & Nepal, 2006). As a result of rules and limitations placed by outside sources on many developing countries' PAs, residents have been compelled to migrate, resource access has been curtailed, and tensions between PA authorities and the local community have frequently been exacerbated (Nepal & Weber, 1995). Ecotourism, a kind of sustainable tourism, is gaining popularity as a means for local communities to develop economically while also preserving their natural and cultural treasures. However, there is a dearth of specifics about the best way to build these places in Nepal to boost community health and longevity. This article's stated goal is to serve as a framework for sustainable community planning in rural areas.

**Goffi et al. (2019).** This study aims to address the topic of how sustainability impacts emerging countries' ability to compete as tourism destinations. Due to the country's enormous and unrealized potential for tourism, Brazil serves as a case study for the research. However, sustainability poses a significant challenge to the expansion of Brazil's tourist business. By demonstrating a positive connection between sustainability traits and the Many social and environmental problems have arisen as a result of the surge in tourism in developing countries. This study highlights the need of rethinking ecotourism to ensure its positive impact on both local populations and the environment. Some recommendations based on real facts may assist developing countries achieve sustainable visitor development.

**Kalaitan et al. (2021).** Looking at ecotourism from a sustainable development perspective, this paper analyses its societal, economic, and environmental impacts. The lack of a standardised approach to measuring and certifying ecotourism is the primary barrier to understanding its actual impact, according to a thorough review of the relevant literature. Even with very basic estimates, ecotourism might significantly boost economies. Utilising BigData technology and electronic visit permits, the most promising approach to monitoring visitor arrivals is to examine data provided by mobile carriers. This information could help researchers determine the full scope of tourism's ecological footprint. The country's budget and environmental monitoring system need to find a method to include the activities of observatories like these. For Ukraine to attract more of this kind of tourist, the government must increase its support and financing. Therefore, 1) we should establish a tax incentive scheme for small businesses engaged in ecotourism; 2) we should increase fiscal decentralisation to ensure that local communities and ecosystems retain the environmental tax; and 3) we should modify the tax base for tourists. This page compiles findings from studies conducted in several nations on how ecotourism influences the level of environmental awareness among both tourists and natives. Ecotourism in Ukraine offers a wealth of unrealized potential, according to the paper.

### Research Methodology

Sixty residents of four Kaledupan villages were interviewed using a semi-structured interview format to get insight into the cultural and economic impacts of Operation Wallacea. Perceptions of these effects were the focal point of the interviews. Questions on the quality of interactions with visitors, inhabitants' perceptions of the effect of visitors on their activities, and the potential financial benefit from visitors were all part of the survey. Additionally, 64 individuals from two villages were interviewed to get their thoughts on the economic, social, and cultural effects of ecotourism. Because research ecotourists and staff reside in one of these villages and interact with people on a daily basis, it was an easy option when deciding between the two. The second community is located in a remote rural area and is only able to interact with ecotourists on rare leisure trips. All in-home interviews and surveys with local people were accompanied by experienced interpreters from either Kaledupa or mainland Sulawesi. In addition, thirty ecotourists serving as research were asked about their knowledge with local traditions and values. After collecting the survey data, we analysed it using content analysis and other standard statistical techniques. We polled 100 individuals to find out who ecotourists are and what motivates them for the research. To analyse the data, we used SPSS 9.0.

### Data Analysis

#### Perceived Socio-Cultural Impacts of Research Ecotourism

Research ecotourism was seen by most respondents in a favourable and enthusiastic light. Many locals expressed increased pride in the region as a result of the influx of visitors, even if they may not have grasped the exact scientific rationale for the research. Rather than focusing on the personal benefits, many people brought up the novelty and excitement that came from having young foreigners reside in villages, particularly among the children. For instance, "tourists make and take part in extracurricular activities.

The research ecotourism operation has varying degrees of involvement with the two villages whose residents were surveyed. Table 1 provides a summary of the questionnaire's Likert scale answers and specifics the instances seen here.

**Table 1: Answers to Statements on a Likert Scale from Two Communities**

| Statement  | Village A (involved with research ecotourism) n = 28 V |                               | Village B (involved with research ecotourism) n = 28 V |                               |
|--|--|-------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
|  | Modal class of responses                               | % of responses in modal class | Modal class of responses                               | % of responses in modal class |
| Tourism makes people feel proud of Kaledupa                                | 1  | 60                            | 2  | 74                            |
| In my community, I would want to see more visitors.                        | 2  | 57                            | 1  | 53                            |
| Meeting visitors broadens my perspective on various cultures.              | 2  | 80                            | 2  | 82                            |
| Visitors need to make an effort to blend in with my village's way of life. | 2  | 63                            | 2  | 66                            |
| Because of tourism, there are more business prospects on Kaledupa          | 2  | 100                           | 2  | 71                            |
| I disagree with visitors that drink booze.                                 | 4  | 47                            | 2  | 66                            |

They like nature and the opportunity to learn about other cultures. In contrast to other research, this one does not take into account the actual likelihood of having personal encounters with ecotourists when drawing conclusions.

In order to maintain a sense of stability in the community, it is especially necessary to respect cultural traditions, according to interviews with residents. "Sometimes young people want to emulate Westerners and wear attire such as vests, which is utterly unpleasant," said a woman from hamlet A who was part of a supporting group for women. But most people who took the survey understood that whether the villages followed Islamic or other traditions was a matter of individual

choice. One acknowledged negative socio-cultural impact of ecotourism is the potential impact of alcohol and inappropriate gender conduct on younger generations. Expectations of behaviour among young people in a Muslim community in a rural area of Indonesia and Western culture vary significantly, particularly with regard to sexual behaviour and alcohol use. Something about this might make you nervous. People in village A who are more extroverted towards tourists are also more tolerant of their alcohol use, according to Table 1. Traditional values and traditions are not diminished when tourists visit communities, contrary to popular belief. Village B, on the other hand, had affects due to the firmly established 'traditional' norms there. The degree to which 'traditional' standards and values are kept is likely to vary depending on the amount of engagement with visitors. This is because changes in the former might be influenced by exposure to various types of media and personal opinions altered by travel. According to the respondents, these factors were crucial in influencing the younger generation's change of heart. The influence of travel on personal growth is greater than that of human contact with visitors, according to an elderly man who participated in the survey. But as you can see from Table 1, there were no big issues with cultural differences between visitors and residents.

By informing their clients about local norms and expectations in beforehand, the study ecotour operator makes sure that their clients do not disrespect them while on vacation. The significance of avoiding drinking alcohol when engaging with locals, proper clothes, and suitable etiquette between the sexes are all included in this article. The study indicated that just half of the people prioritise public drinking too much. Regardless, almost all ecotourists (98%) were willing to follow local dress codes and alcohol use restrictions, demonstrating their willingness to adapt.

#### **Perceived Economic Impacts of Research Ecotourism**

In light of the little but discernible economic benefits of research ecotourism, the questioned locals were enthusiastic about the prospect of revenue generating. The sale of food and crafts, the rental of housing for travellers, or direct employment made these things feasible. The availability of these benefits, according to interviews and first-hand accounts, is contingent upon a person's socioeconomic status and other unique characteristics. Direct employment required either fluency in English or experience operating boats; the reliability of the local workforce and the steady stream of visitors were both reflected in the stable staffing levels. All of the houses were built by locals with the intention of housing the research ecotourism operator, therefore it was thought that more people in the community benefited financially from renting these houses. Those with the means to purchase land on Hoga and finance construction projects are obviously the only ones eligible to take part in this. Contrarily, because to the inclusive character of the activity, a broader spectrum of individuals, including women, adolescents, and the elderly, may participate in selling food and crafts.

Tables 1 and 2 highlight the many ways in which communities may take part in the financial benefits of ecotourism, reflecting the various ways in which individuals see the potential for earning money from ecotourism. Since most landowners reside in village A on the island of Hoga, renting out homes has become more important and economically advantageous to the residents there. hamlet B believe that selling handcrafted items has the most potential. Since fewer and fewer individuals in village B will gain from these programmes, animosity between the two villages is possible. Be mindful, however, that you can only rent out your property or find job for a maximum of since the study ecotourism activity is seasonal.

**Table 2: I Disagree with Visitors that Drink Booze**

| <b>Perceived economic opportunity</b>   | <b>% in Village A n = 28</b> | <b>% in Village B n = 36</b> |
|---|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Rental of accommodation                 | 86                           | 22                           |
| Sale of food                            | 10                           | 11                           |
| Sale of handicrafts                     | 4                            | 61                           |
| Operate dive boat                       | 0                            | 0                            |
| Organise tours for research ecotourists | 0                            | 5                            |

Any income that comes in during those three months is considered a boost to what is currently coming in, not a substitute for it. Physical infrastructure repairs done by some individuals during their stay in the communities also provide an residents.

Consequently, it is evident that the majority of the revenue generated by research ecotourism is derived from seasonal activities and mostly benefits male landowners or residents of villages with whom the operator has extensive contacts as a consequence of their location. Opposition to ecotourism and dilution of host communities' economic power have been voiced in response to the pattern of a small number of elites consistently collecting enormous quantities of money. The aforementioned concepts of ecotourism are at odds with this tendency. One may make the case that concentrating on the distribution of funds in an ecotourism project ignores the variety of the local population and might eventually lead to power consolidation. However, the results of this case study demonstrate that research ecotourism is well-received by locals and has had no detrimental impact on community values or relationships between hosts and guests. Looking at the altruistic surplus phenomena, rather than adopting social exchange theory, may help us understand the implications on host communities. This is due to the fact that financial gains take a back seat to the more nebulous advantages to the community as a whole that result from regular, casual interaction with tourists. While the former stems from a more communal approach to city development, it's not hard to see how ecotourism and related pursuits may provide intangible communal advantages that could be more highly prized than individual financial advantages. One village leader said that the research ecotourism benefits the community as a whole, not just individuals.

On the other hand, the host community likely has a lot of social capital, which may be defined as individual ones. Thus, the collective, not the individuals, is the centre of attention. Additional research on the study region's social capital features is needed to confirm this, however there are a few things that may be considered as helping it expand. People in this culture often join is run by the government, and there is a strong emphasis on cooperative organisations owned by locals to facilitate commerce. These practices may help to maintain and spread common values and norms. People in rural areas like Kaledupa rely heavily on one other, which may explain why community values have been more strong during economically difficult periods, will be ruined." The general opinion is summarised by this. Given this, it's reasonable to conclude that research ecotourism's aforementioned benefits are both a reflection of and a first-hand information or experience with tourism, local populations in the research region may rely more on gut sentiments or intuition when answering questions about the effects of ecotourism than on rational consideration of costs and benefits.

### **Profiling Research Ecotourists**

Since 95% of the study's ecotourists were full-time college students, comparing their age and income to earlier surveys or the broader population is pointless. Ecotourists made up 63% of the sample, with 75% pursuing degrees in the STEM fields and the remaining 25% enrolled in The findings of an Earthwatch survey are consistent with this. Among those who take an interest in environmental issues, 91% report seeing news stories about them on a regular or occasional basis, 61% report making donations to environmental organisations on a regular or occasional basis, and 34% report being active members of such groups. You can examine the summary of the factor analysis results for the individual viewpoints of several ecotourism-related elements reported in the literature in Table 3. There are three main ways in which people see the benefits to culture, the environment, and the community. Although the former had the highest loading, the distribution of Likert scores shows that remarks on ecotourism's positive effects on the environment and host communities were the most popular across the whole sample.

Shows how the research ecotourism organisation analysed the responses of its participants to motivational messages using a Likert-scale and component analysis. It seems that the respondents are culturally-oriented, given that Factor 1 emphasises completely embracing Indonesian society and culture. As the overall variation that this group can explain attests, there is a great deal of internal consistency among individuals. Factor 2 is a set of assertions that emphasise the value of seizing the opportunity to gain knowledge, usually concerning the local flora and fauna. Groups who place a high priority on socialising and resting during their vacation are represented by factors 3 and 5, which have some overlap. Sunbathing, swimming, and making new friends are common pursuits for these types of vacationers. Contrarily, Factor 4 stands out due to its focus on personal goals, some of which can be unrelated to the final location. Also, over half of those who took the survey said it was "very important" that their work experience Despite widespread agreement on its significance, factor analysis failed to find any correlations with other sets of variables, indicating that responses. majority of respondents greatly preferred responses that were directly tied to the stated objectives.

**Table 3: Factor Analysis and Specifics of Likert Scale Answers about the Components of Ecotourism that Study Ecotourists thought to be Present**

| Factor   | Variance | Loading | Modal Class of Responses | % of Responses in Modal Class |
|--|----------|---------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. An emphasis on culture Local history is included into the experience. Those who join in the yearly festivities are cordially welcomed by the locals. Tenting or staying with a local family are two possible places to stay. Local religion and culture are included into the experience. | 1.37     | 0.7     | 3                        | 40                            |
|  |          | 0.7     | 3                        | 44                            |
|  |          | 0.63    | 3                        | 41                            |
|  |          | 0.53    | 4                        | 44                            |
| Environmental priority Enjoy nature with the least amount of disruption restricted travel with little effect Travel occurs in small groups. Food and beverages supplied locally are eaten.   | 9.7      | 0.75    | 5                        | 78                            |
|  |          | 0.66    | 5                        | 83                            |
|  |          | 0.43    | 4                        | 47                            |

From what we can tell, the typical research ecotourist is a young person in their first year of college majoring in the natural sciences who is passionate about environmental issues, hopes to have an impact through their travels, and is ultimately motivated by a thirst for adventure, cultural immersion, and environmental knowledge. These characteristics distinguish them from ecotourists who identify as "deep green" or "dark green," who are similar to "mainstream ecotourists" who want to see wildlife and natural areas without interacting with natives. The little data on ecotourists also implies that these factors contradict the common perception that ecotourism is just about being physically active and being in close contact with nature. Indeed, there are striking similarities to the backpacker group in regard to aspirations, preferred pastimes, and the potential financial benefits of such travel. Ecotourists could be interested in these aspects because they promote the type of relaxed conversation that locals find useful for bridging cultural gaps.

### Conclusion

Despite the fact that local elites tend to focus on the monetary rewards of research ecotourism, this study demonstrates that residents of underdeveloped nations also get intangible socio-cultural gains. The research found that ecotourists' characteristics and travel motivations explain these benefits. This school of thought maintains that ecotourism destinations like the Wakatobi should prioritise research into ecotourism. Although research ecotourism is small-scale and repercussions given the nature and activities of research ecotourists. This is particularly evident in their desire to incorporate cross-cultural awareness into their ecotourism-related personal values and their receptivity to learning about local cultures and beliefs. Despite their very different origins, the host and visitor are able to have a social interaction in an environment of understanding and enthusiasm, respectively, which allows for the favourable outcomes detailed in this case study. Moreover, studies focusing on marine ecotourism are more likely to have a beneficial impact on the environment than nature-based tourist business development, which, if not handled correctly, may lead to environmental degradation—a problem that many other marine national parks have experienced.

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