



A Critical Analysis of the Established Explanations about the Nature of Ecotourism

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Abstract

This qualitative study questions the prevailing explanations about the nature of ecotourism. The major aims of the study are (a) to point out that the widespread notions and theoretical attributions about the character of ecotourism should be reconsidered and (b) to express the need for critical questioning and design in qualitative and quantitative academic studies in social, management, administrative and tourism sciences. The article explains, first, the basic rationale for legitimizing, market building, supporting, sustaining and expanding the capitalist market, including ecotourism practices, and connects the concept of environment with economy, and inclusion of tourism and ecotourism in sustainable development. Then, it discusses the nature of dominant explanations of ecotourism. The study concludes that widespread explanations of the nature, structure, activity and outcome of ecotourism rarely match the nature of daily ecotourism practices. Instead, they generally create, employ and sustain functional myths about industrial practices, relations, causes, effects and outcomes of ecotourism. They provide strategically prescriptive and normative ethics and principles that are mostly unattainable. They consciously or inadvertently ignore the fact that the notion of ecotourism is deeply embedded in the logics of ideological normalisation of corporate activities, commodity circulation, technological end-product distribution and use, and global governance of the economic, political and cultural market conditions.

Keywords: Ecotourism, ecotourism industry, mind management, critical inquiry, ecotourism practices, environmental protection.

Introduction

The major trend in tourism, especially since the mid 1980s, has been expansion of tourism from mass tourism to the various types of nature-based tourism, including ecotourism. Since the term “ecotourism” was introduced in the 1960s (Hetzer, 1965), it has been extensively considered a benign and preferable form of tourism. Since 1990s, it has been hailed as (a) the fastest growing sector of the travel and tourism industry, (b)

a universal remedy for regional and local development that benefits and empowers local communities, (c) a way to fund environmental conservation and scientific research, protect fragile ecosystems, educate and create widespread environmental awareness among people, tourists and tourism industry, and foster world peace (Hall and Boyd, 2003; Honey, 2008). Consequently, new challenges have emerged in order to generate market expansion and increase tourist demand for the new types of tourism. Tour operators and tourism agencies accordingly have made changes in their field of activities and included rural and natural areas in their sphere of activities. Tourism investors have expanded their activities beyond the seashores and moved to rural areas and inside the wilderness, including national parks. The need for and activities of demand creation and expansion for ecotourism have increased. Governments, bureaucrats, academicians and business people in developing countries have started considering ecotourism as an engine of growth, and source of foreign exchange and employment to revive the local economy (Sreekumar and Parayil, 2002, p. 529; Tosun et al., 2003). Valuable resources have been diverted to the provision of airports, local transport, infrastructure and hotels with a view to creating a niche of their own in the international (eco) tourism market. Natural forests have been encroached by expanding tourism activities. Houses and physical environment in rural areas, old towns and historical neighbourhoods in cities have been renovated; people have been removed from their houses, investors who have close (mostly financial) relations with high ranking officials in governing bodies have moved in, and eye-catching fake environments have been created in the name of historical or natural authenticity in order to attract domestic and international tourists. Academicians have started doing research in ecotourism. Simultaneously, theoretical, promotional and mystified explanations about the nature and benefits of ecotourism have flourished and proliferated.

However, within a short period of time some scholars have started questioning the practices and assumptions about the nature and benefits of ecotourism (Lindberg *et al.*, 1996; Butler, 1990; Wheeller, 1991; Hall, 1994). Focusing on the ecotourism issue in the early 1990s, Wheeller (1991) viewed alternative forms of tourism as a sophisticated deception and effective marketing tool for demand expansion. “By clothing itself in a greenmantle, the industry is being provided with a shield with which it can both deflect valid criticism and improve its own image while, in reality, continuing its familiar short tourism commercial march” (Wheeller, 1991, p. 96).

At the same time, we have witnessed the emergence and development of various critical schools of tourism/ecotourism studies with substantial questions and alternative research methodologies (Higham, 2000; Cater, 2006; Duffy, 2002; Tribe, 2003; Hall and Tucker, 2004; Vivanco, 2002; Aitchison, 2006; Hall, 2007; Burns and Novelli, 2008; Bianchi, 2009; Laudati, 2010, Fletcher, 2011). They demonstrate a shift from research designs that are based on mainly qualitative positivist or positivist-empirical traditions to interpretative and critical modes of inquiry that is based on understanding tourism and ecotourism in their wider national and international political, economic, cultural and social contexts with power and interest relations. Giving studies by Vivanco (2001), West and Carrier (2004), Duffy and Moore (2010) and Fletcher points out (2011, p. 448) the following:

“Ecotourism is seen to embody such characteristic neoliberal mechanisms as privatization, marketization, commodification and deregulation in its emphasis on employing nature-based sightseeing as a force for locally-directed economic

development based on individual entrepreneurship through affixing monetary value to in situ natural resources and thus creating both a market and incentive for their sustainable management. West and Carrier (2004, p. 484), therefore, describe ecotourism as ‘the institutional expression of particular sets of late capitalist values in a particular political-economic climate.’

The primary objective of critical approaches is not “to shake the current stagnant literature on the subject of ecotourism out of a state of complacency” (Higham, 2007), rather to provide an analysis of reliability and validity of knowledge, present fresh and alternative insights in topics, methods, causes and effects. Critically evaluating the “critical turn” in tourism studies and questioning the nature of the domination of “cultural” in critical turn, Foucauldian and post-structuralist approaches, Bianchi (2009, p. 493) indicates that “the ‘critical turn’ appears to have retreated into a preoccupation with discourse and representation, leaving the study of the economic and political relations of power in tourism to those who whole-heartedly embrace neo-liberal globalization and the free market”.

Human beings produce ideas (as knowledge, information, belief, opinion) during the production of their material life. Thus, they reproduce their material and conceptual life at the same time. They explain to themselves and to others the nature of material relations. Doing so, they sometimes intentionally or unintentionally provide explanations that do not match the real nature of the explained object, activity or relationship: They restructure and reformulate the explained through the explanation in such a way that the explained becomes something that is different from itself. Myths and false images of reality are produced through communicative actions that also include scholarly explanations. Prevailing discourses of image and myth making are also integral part of environmental politics. This article provides a critical analysis of the dominant explanations presented about the nature of ecotourism. It aims to provide critical evaluation of the prevailing explanations of ecotourism and to point out that there is a need for critical inquiry in tourism and that the widespread notions and theoretical attributions about the character of ecotourism should be reconsidered.

Method

This qualitative design is based on the information collected from the critical and non-critical sources in ecotourism. In order to analyze the prevailing explanations of ecotourism, basic determining/descriptive elements (main indicators) in the explanations were identified and main categories that are focus of the ecotourism studies were derived from these elements (indicators). Thirty-three descriptive elements were identified from the ecotourism literature. Seven main categories were derived from these elements: (1) place of activity, (2) objectives of activity, (3) types of activity, (4) Actors of activity: tourists as clients and conscientious users (5) Actors of activity: tourism and travel industry, (6) outcomes of activity and (7) managing and regulating the activity: Local empowerment and role of state institutions. Few categories were divided into sub-categories. The analyses were presented under these main categories.

The study started with explaining the necessity of mythmaking for governing the minds, interests and activities of people, followed by the reinterpretation of economy with the concept of environment and the inclusion of tourism in development as sustainable tourism and expanding it to the ecotourism. After this brief background explanation, it analyzed and discussed the prevailing explanations of ecotourism.

Analysis: Brief background

Myth/Image Making and Its Basis

Throughout the organized human life, the art of mind management and management of the economical, political and cultural marketplace have always required the creation of myths via conceptual frameworks and daily and ritual practices. The need for myth making has gained higher momentum when the control of people who started demanding democratic rights by mass demonstrations, rallies and strikes have become urgent for governance since the second half of the 19th century. In order to save the democracy from the democratic participation of common people, the planned practices of the creation of public opinion and manufacturing the consent of people have gained utmost importance. The triumph of public opinion and consent creation have been reinforced by the fear of unemployment and daily ideological and oppressive practices of private sector and state apparatuses.

Beside the mass movements, two interrelated developments have shaped the accelerated need for mind management. The first one is the expansion of mass production and consequently, emergence of mass production of demand/consumer. The second one is the marketing goods and services. Since the second half of the 19th century and beginning of the, 20th century, the capitalist system has realized that the demand could not be left free: Mass production has required mass consumption and sustained and increased consumer (or voter, tourist) demand. Thus, those who produce materials in masses also have started the business of actively creating the demand in masses. The mind management business quickly has proliferated and became a highly lucrative business.

The need for demand creation has brought along the need of marketing and advertising the mass-produced goods to the domestic and international markets. After the Second World War, the US academicians, businesspersons and politicians have engaged in massive effort of creating, sustaining and expanding the demand for American way of life that is controlled by the logic of capitalist production, distribution and consumption of the mass produced goods and services. A complete package was prepared and named as “modernization and development.” This package contained the political and economic structure mimicking “western democracy and free market.” Modernization and development were presented as the aim and the process of transferring the western political and economical institutional structures. The East and the South transferred the western institutions, bought a lot of weapons, television sets, radios, cinema films, musical equipments, music tapes and household goods.

Contrary to the generally accepted idea, the modernization and development projects were not failed, because the objective was never “to develop some country,” but to create and sustain the conditions of dependency, the development of underdevelopment, to use the natural and human resources all over the world and sell finished mass products. In fact, the modernization era of 1950s, 1960s and 1970s was very difficult, tiring, but very lucrative era for the capitalist ideological, political and economical market: They successfully created the economical, political and ideological infrastructure during this initial preparation phase of transition to the global neo-colonialism. During the acceleration of transition to the global neo-colonialism that is also a function of changes in the West in the 1980s, the welfare state policy was collapsed by bold initiatives of the capitalists and a new era called neo-liberalism has

started. Such transition has required massive activities to sell the “facts” of neo-liberal market, market relations and their outcomes. As Bourdieu stated (1998, p. 101), along with the neo-economic policies, the political and economical power holders have deified the power of markets in the name of economic efficiency, demanded the lifting of the administrative or political barriers that could hinder the owners of capital in their purely individual pursuit of maximum profit instituted as a model of rationality, wanted independent central banks, preached the subordination of the national states to the demands of economic freedom for the masters of the economy, wanted the suppression of all regulations on all markets starting with the labour market, privatized the public services, and reduced the public and welfare spending.

Along with these changes, the new mythmaking needs have emerged and many new redefinitions and introductions of new theoretical approaches and concepts have created and circulated widely.

In order to survive, myths should be buttressed by (a) some other myths that are created via politics of business principles and ethics, mass media practices, academic studies, (b) planned activities like certificates and awards, dinner parties, symposiums and ceremonies, and (c) some factual examples like poor becoming rich, some success stories about environmental protection and financial gains in some places, and examples of few bad ecotourists, tour operators and managers.

Connecting the Economy with Environment

The reinterpretation of the economy, human interest and society through environmental rhetoric has slowly emerged in the 1970s and gained momentum in the 1980s and 1990s. The intellectual bias and mythological character of sustainable development have existed at the beginning of its official formation and declaration by the World Commission of Environment and Development (WCED, 1987, p. 43). It was declared that sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The declaration acknowledges that there is a serious problem in sustaining the needs at present and danger of on sustainability in the future. This catchy phrase and accompanying explanations give the impression that sustainable development is the sustainability of every body's needs and interests. In fact, the same old policy is disguised in different clothing: Control of global economical and political marketplace by owning, controlling, exploiting the resources, marketing the goods and services. There is no demand for structural change in industrial practices that are primarily responsible for human and environmental conditions (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Di Castri, 2000; Bianchi, 2004).

At the 1992 Rio Conference on the environment, the mythological, but functional marketing notion of sustainability was accepted by governments, NGOs and many environmentalists. Finally, it turned out to be the part of global politics of domination as green geopolitics supported by the U.S. and the EU in the 2000s.

Inclusion of Tourism and Ecotourism in Development

Rationale behind the inclusion of tourism in national development can be summarized by the OECD statement: "Tourism helps to speed up development in poor countries. It is easier to attract tourists than to sell high-tech products on the world market" (Kertsen, 1997). This statement rests on the notion of comparative advantage

and has very little validity since it establishes wrong and unfounded reasons for development: In history, no poor country in Asia, Africa or South America (and no rich country) has experienced sustainable development that is based on tourism rather than (high) technology.

In 1989, the Hague Declaration on Tourism focused on the place of tourism in economic and social development. It emphasized the importance of formulating and applying policies to promote harmonious development of domestic and international tourism and leisure activities for the benefit of all those who participate in them. However, this explicit acknowledgement of the socio-economic issues appears to have been lost in the subsequent discourse on sustainable tourism (Roe, *et al.*, 2003). Later, ecotourism was introduced as a form of sustainable tourism: “Ecotourism is a sector of tourism, based on nature travel, but including the principle of sustainability (TIES, 2003, p. 5). It was regarded as a viable tool for economic development that takes into account conservation (Khan, 2003, p. 109). During the implementation of this policy, new “environment friendly” products were produced, clean production processes, environmental monitoring and rehabilitation systems were developed, initiatives for preventing pollution, reducing waste and maximizing the energy savings were taken by the same system that pollute the environment. These policies based on the instrumental rationality enhanced the corporate image, profits, productivity, resource management, labour utilisation, energy savings, and the power of the corporate and state control at the same time (Butcher, 2007). Ecotourism with the framework of ecological sustainability has developed as the parcel and part of this market policy that has expanded its sphere of influence and activity in rural and natural areas, enhancing the tourism industry, mass-market consumerism and dependency, and destroying indigenous life forms and ecological integrity.

Analysis: Prevailing Explanations of Ecotourism

As Higham (2007, p. 5) explains, “ecotourism provides an intriguing and hitherto unresolved definitional conundrum”. International and national organizations and societies of tourism and travel agencies, academicians, politicians, tourism and travel agencies have created their own definitions, goals and problems of ecotourism. In a comparative study of ecotourism policy in the Latin America, it was found that of the 25 tourism agencies that chose to define ecotourism, 21 preferred to create their own home-made definition (Mader, 2002, p. 272). Explanations of ecotourism that are presented by the proponents of dominant paradigms use many functional concepts like responsible travel, natural areas, wildlife, nature-based, small scale, benign, non-damaging, non-degrading, environmental protection, minimum or no impact, bird watching, wildlife watching, nature walk, conscientious use, sustainability, conservation, balance, awareness, education, admiring, knowing, appreciation, respecting, participation, local life, culture, history, welfare, economic benefit for local communities, local ownership, the relevance of cultural resources, and host community participation. These multitudes of concepts are utilized in order to provide rich and extensive explanations on the nature of ecotourism.

1. Explanations about Place of Activity

In ecotourism, place of activity is prescribed as natural environment: Ecotourism is a natural history-based and/or wildlife-related recreation activity (Hvenegaard, 1994),

done in natural, undisturbed and uncontaminated natural (Valentine, 1993; Blamey, 1997; Björk, 2000, Björk, 2007) and pristine areas (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1991).

These descriptions create a false image that any activity done in the natural areas is ecotourism. The activity of place is not sufficient causal condition for the ecotourism: Ecotourism is an activity determined by nature of activity, not by the place of activity. It is not the location or the quantity, but the nature of the use, organization, activity and outcome that characterizes ecotourism.

2. Explanations about Objectives of Activity

Explanations about the objective of ecotourism are mainly related with the attractive nature of place, honourable intentions of ecotourists, motives of organizers which are based on providing service, and theoretical objective of conservation and sustainability.

The attractive nature of the place: According to the related literature, ecotourism is a form of tourism that inspired primarily by the natural history of an area, including its indigenous cultures (Ziffer, 1989; Mansperger, 1995). Then, driving force of the ecotourism is the historical and cultural inspiration (pull) of the place. Then, the visitor is motivated by the inspirational, historical and cultural character of the place. If there is no pull, there can be no reason to go there. This normalcy is true for certain places, but other places are reorganized for ecotourism by landscape designers and developers in order to fabricate attractive “natural environment”.

Honourable intentions of ecotourists: Beside a few factual ones, explanations related with the intentions of ecotourists are generally mystified exaggerations: Ecotourism is “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people” (TIES , 2003, p. 5). The ecotourists visit relatively undeveloped areas in the spirit of appreciation, participation and sensitivity (Ziffer, 1989) with the specific objective of admiring, studying, relaxation, sightseeing, adventure and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any cultural features (both past and present) found in the areas (Cabellos-Lascurain, 1991). It is to admire study and enjoy the existing nature, wild plants, animals and any cultural features found in the areas. It is travel for study, enjoyment, or volunteer assistance. It is to appreciate and conserve the nature, culture and local life, and interact with nature and rural life for the purpose of knowing, exploration, training and education (Wight, 1993; Weaver, 1999; Björk, 2007). Moral superiority of ecotourists and ecotourism in terms of environmental sensitivity, conservation and community development are also highly questionable (Butcher, 2005).

Theoretical objective of conservation and sustainability: According to the prevailing literature, ecotourism establishes a supportive balance between the natural environment and use of environment for ecotourism: The development of ecotourism can help saving the natural environment by encouraging a non-consumptive use of wildlife, while generating valuable foreign income. The ecotourists must be offered genuine areas and possibilities to take part, be active and learn. All actors should benefit from an ecotourism development (Björk, 2000, p.194). These normative and prescriptive narratives present ecotourism as a tool for both conservation and sustainable development, especially in areas where local people are asked to forgo the consumptive use of resources for others (Wallace and Pierce, 1996). This focus on the

notion of balance between economic interests and environmental conservation is one of the main tenets of ecotourism. This notion is nourished by the ideology of sustainable tourism.

3. Explanations about Types of Activity

Currently, there are many activities that are considered ecotourism. There are no myths or false images on naming the types of activities. The myths and false images are created while describing and promoting the activities by attaching them some extraordinary gratifications they provide. However there is a promotional tendency to include some activities that can not be considered ecotourism.

4. Explanations about Actors of Activity: The Nature of Tourists

Tourists are depicted in the ecotourism literature in some instrumentally functional ways (Higham and Carr, 2002; Lu and Stepchenkova, 2012) and various myths are created and reinforced on each instance:

- The ecotourism definitions consider tourists primarily as the active agents of the ecotourism. They are the ones that take the trip with certain objectives, go to destinations, stay there for a while and return home. However, they exclude the role of the industrial practices on the course of decisions, choices and actions.

- Ecotourists are presented as conscientious users of the nature with good intentions. They are environmentally aware, sensitive, dedicated, knowing and contributing actors (Dolnicar, Crouch and Long, 2008). We can logically deduct at least two conclusions from these statements: (1) If these are the discriminating and distinguishing factors, then mainstream tourists are not aware, sensitive, knowing and contributing. (2) Ecotourists are potential culprits if anything happens to the nature. Despite the theoretically stated superior objectives, not all tourists can be expected environmentally aware and sensitive ones. Furthermore, tourist behaviours cannot always be congruent with the awareness and knowing, since there are strong intervening variables that eliminate the causal relationship between the awareness, knowledge, attitude and the behaviour.

- Depicting ecotourists as environmentally aware, the studies indicate that they should be informed, enlightened and educated by the ecotourism industry. There is logical inconsistency in this kind of statements: There is no need to inform, enlighten and educate the ecotourist if they are environmentally aware and motivated; awareness and motivation leads to information gathering, enlightenment and education, and vice versa. Education is frequently presented as solution to many problems by the dominant paradigms in the social sciences. In fact, most of the time education is neither the cause nor the solution. Finding statistical significant relations between the education and material and mental poverty does not mean that there is a causal relationship. It only means they exist together. We should look for causes elsewhere. We know there are environmental problems (and material and mental poverty). Roots of vast environmental deterioration and damage are not lack of education or behaviour of uneducated people. The damage uneducated/illiterate people have caused to environment in 10.000 years is most likely incomparably less than the extent of damage highly educated people who run industries for organized interests created on earth in last one year.

- Ecotourists are presented as customers to be catered by the travel agents, tour operators and hotel industry: "In order for any ecotourism business to position itself favourably in the global marketplace, it has to deliver high quality service that fulfils the

needs and expectations of ecotourists” (Khan, 2003, p. 109, 110). A few questionable claims are upheld here: There is competitive market; the industry aware of this fact, thus, it competes for providing the best possible service.

- It is claimed that ecotourists are new types of tourists are highly selective, educated, demanding and eager to seek information, and sensitive to the environment, thus, they are one of the driving forces urging the industry to become more responsive to the environmental issues (Wearing and Neil, 2009; Krugger, 2005). It is not clearly known if there is such pressure coming from tourists. Studies show conflicting results about the nature ecotourists. For instance, Ryan, Hughes and Chirgwin (2000, p. 148) indicate that ecotourism may be culturally determined, with the culture being that of consumerism; it is a hedonistic experience rather than concerned with learning. Similarly, (Duffy, 2002, p. 40,157) points out that they are not interested in the idea of community development, environmental protection and aboriginal justice. They do not display “features of self reflexivity that might produce environmentally development.”

- Ecotourists are viewed as money spenders at the destination, thus, they are the chief contributing agents to the local development. Ecotourists cannot spend much money at the destination even if they want to, because you cannot spend money in natural areas, national parks and wildernesses, except paying for entrance fee and buying some local souvenirs. In any case, a large proportion of the money spent by ecotourists is spent at the place of origin for buying the tickets and/or vacation package (Wall, 1997, p. 489).

5. Explanations about Actors of activity: Tourism and Travel Industry

The dominant explanations set the agenda by discussing the role of the industry in terms of principles, ethics, social responsibility, sustainable business, organizational effectiveness and providing services to ecotourists. These ethics, principles and ideas are generally part of politics of image making, marketing, mind and behaviour management practices that support the organized material relations of daily life.

The major myth of the good nature of industry is reproduced by attaching the tourism and travel industry certain roles compatible with high principles of conduct: They provide services without intentionally causing ecological, social, cultural and economical damages. It is generally accepted that there are and can be problems, because of “bad guys”. “Bad guys” are used for legitimization of prevailing practices and setting up ethics and principles: According the Executive Director of The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) Honey (2004) presenting the “genuine ecotourism” as saviour, indicates the existence of ample evidence that “in many places, ecotourism’s principles and core practices are being corrupted and watered down, hijacked and perverted”. Similarly, some studies indicate that some travel agencies and tour operators engage in misleading marketing activities using names and symbols that provide false images such as nature with its best, eco adventure, sole ecofeeling, adventure experience, Eco-Rent-A-Car, Eco-Taxis, Eco-Cines, Eco-Parking Lots. In Latin America, “Proyectos ecoturísticos” sell everything from community development projects to jet skis (Mader, 2002, p. 272). For instance, the web page of Gordon Guide (2005) promotes ecotourism and cultural tours in Turkey as follows: “GAP Adventures offers travellers a grassroots, small group adventure vacation, with a focus on culture, nature and active travel; small international groups, excellent guides, delicious local cuisine, special destinations and charming local accommodations, all come together to create an authentic adventure experience”.

Many ecotourism developments are unchecked, unaccredited and only hint that they are based on policies that are environmentally friendly (Ananthaswamy, 2004). As Twidale and Bourne (2003, p. 483) point out “some administrators and tour operators not only have a relaxed and sanguine attitude to false claims, inaccurate data and misleading language, but actively and vigorously oppose its being corrected”. The expanding domination of neo-liberal politics that shuns the government intervention and upholds the self-regulation or auto-control unfortunately buttresses the practices of fakery and show off. Principles, ethics, forged social responsibility, legal restrictions and regulations cannot make people act accordingly, unless a business culture and awareness supporting such actions exist.

The relations of the industry with ecotourists are reduced to providing sound service: The tourism industry only caters the objectives and needs of ecotourists. The practices of mind management in this sense include the use of people as vehicles of attaining and sustaining power that demands creation of norms and habits of consumption and conspicuous consumption.

Material interest of the industry either presented as universal fact in explanations of ecotourism or does not mentioned at all.

6. Explanations about Outcomes of Activity

The ecotourism studies generally cite positive outcomes as well as potential and some actual negative outcomes. Some studies indicate that (a) ecotourism causes no undesirable environmental effects on destination, (b) provides economic welfare for the host community, (c) brings balanced sustainability by providing local benefits while maintaining ecological integrity; (d) sustains the local culture; (e) and fosters environmental understanding, appreciation and conservation.

a. Use without effect and contribution to environment

According to the literature, ecotourism is benign, non-consumptive, non-damaging, non-exploitative and non-degrading use of wildlife and natural resources; it does not have any undesirable environmental effect on destination (Ziffer, 1989; Hvenegaard, 1994), and provides ecological sustainability and direct contribution to the continued protection and management of areas used (Valentine, 1993; Björk, 2000).

Contrary to these claims, some environmental impact and ecological disturbance are inescapable even in the most meticulously prepared and run ecotourism activity. There cannot be any use without some undesirable outcomes. As Wall indicates (1997, p.488), “there are good reasons for suggesting that ecotourism has the potential to be environmentally disruptive. Ecotourism is usually directed to very special places that may have limited ability to withstand use pressures. Even small numbers of users generate impacts. The off-site and en route impacts may be substantial.

b. Social, cultural and economic benefit to host community

According to the studies, ecotourism contributes to the community through employment and other financial means, provides the economic well-being to the local residents, brings welfare to the local communities and recognizes the needs and rights of local populations (Pederson, 1998; Twynam and Johnston, 2002). It maintains and enhances the integrity of the natural and social-cultural elements and sustains the culture (Scace *et al.*, 1992).

These are mostly exaggerated social, economic and cultural effects. Ecotourism activities are initiated, managed and co-managed by “outsiders” (Belsky, 1999; Wearing and McDonald, 2002; Jones, 2005). It brings low regard to environmental protection and local life style that is marketed as part of the commodified cultural, enjoyment and experience package (Campbell, 1999; Loon and Polakow, 2001; Stem *et al.*, 2003; Jones, 2005; Laudati, 2010). There are increasing examples that traditional mode of production and resource uses are considerably influenced by allocation of resources for ecotourism activities. Bulk of studies (Place, 1991; Lindberg *et al.*, 1996; Scheyvens, 1999; Honey, 1999; Duffy, 2002; Stem *et al.*, 2003; Gücü and Gücü, 2003; Stone and Wall, 2004; Laudati, 2010; Zapata, *et al.*, 2011) indicate that, as tourism expands, (a) local people increasingly lose their lands, (b) they are deprived of their way of life like farming, forestry, grazing, mining and hunting, (c) the unemployment, poverty, loss of life style, migration, dependency and external control are the prevailing outcome of ecotourism for the most local people, (d) relatively few jobs and seasonal low paid wages are created for local residents, and (e) local people often receive little or no benefit from any kind of tourism.

Furthermore, tourism/ecotourism is a seasonal activity: it creates a seasonal parasitic commercial culture at its best while destroying the traditional local way of life and indigenous development. It is externally induced economic activity in the interest of outsiders. It provides high profits to travel agencies, tour operators, airlines and investors, and some income for local administrators, politicians, local shops, drug pushers. Ecotourism, like mass tourism, fosters local political and administrative corruption, money laundering, the international drug trading, extensive foreign influence on the local community and society. Leakage to outside from the local community is over 90% in many countries. Experience in some locations places like in Costa Rica, Ecuador, Botswana and Kenya shows that ecotourism turns to be mass tourism once demand is created. Then, the international accommodation and service companies dominate the local area and control the market.

c. Balanced sustainability and development

Ecotourism is presented as sustainable tourism based on a positive overall balance in environmental, communal and economic interrelations. It is theoretically true that ecotourism's appeal as a conservation and development tool rests in its potential to provide local economic benefits while maintaining ecological resource integrity through low-impact (Marion and Reid, 2007; Wearing and Neil, 2009; Angelica *et al.*, 2010) and non-consumptive resource use (Farrell and Marion, 2001; Stem *et al.*, 2003), and reduce leakage, create local employment, and foster sustainable development (Jones, 2005). Yet, these are “ecotourism’s theoretical potentials”. Theoretically stated potential benefits should not be confused with the actual happenings and facts of organized practices. In actual daily relations, the sustainability means ecological, economical and cultural sustainability, but the ecotourism activities can mean only the economical sustainability of the organizing industry with some costly financial benefits to the local areas, while ecological and cultural sustainability remain mostly discourse at the rhetorical and ostentatious levels. The economical sustainability of the capital/business is the aim and the rest are mostly strategies and tactics for market maintenance and expansion. While the sustainability notion “ostensibly represents endeavours to protect and manage the sustainability of our biosphere, it arguably serves as a more efficient means for rapacious and predatory social forces to retain cultural dominance and

productive security” (Bandy, 1996, p.539). Duffy (2000, p.551) explains that Belize, for example, markets itself based on its pristine natural environments; this exotic image is packaged and commodified by external consumption; it has little to do with the harsh reality of people live in the area. The commoditization transforms the use value to exchange value, and the meaning and value of cultural products are determined by exchange value, thus, some parts of a local life and culture are destroyed because it has no meaning or stands contrary to the interest of capitalist economic and political market, some parts are reshaped, relocated, repositioned or renovated, and some other parts are kept as is for the gaze and experience of the tourists while destroying their authentic character and leaving only mere appearances and mechanical re-functionality defined by the interest of capital.

Similarly, Weaver (2001) points out that the whole issue of sustainability has proven to be murky and contentious. It is “unlikely that anything can be described as being ecologically or socio-culturally sustainable beyond the shadow of a doubt” (Duffy, 2002, p.104).

d. Negative outcomes, problems and solutions

While some ecotourism studies recognize the problems “as shortcomings,” some others state negative outcomes as probability: The development of ecotourism can create socio-economic problems, affect wildlife and indigenous people and conflict with conservation efforts. These potential negative outcomes are attributed mostly to the ecotourists’ use behaviours, some irresponsible tour operators and travel agents, and the shortcomings of legal structure.

Some of the on-side impacts include disturbance of ecology and damage to natural resources (Deng *et al.*, 2003, p.530; Erdogan, 2003), waste generation, habitat disturbance and destruction, forest degradation (Stem *et al.*, 2003, p.322,324), removal of vegetation (e.g. collection of plants or firewood), air pollution, noise pollution, tourist traffic, soil erosion and compacting, trail proliferation, trail widening, tread incision, muddiness on trails, vegetation cover loss, excessive soil and root exposure, tree damage, permanent restructuring of the environment through infrastructure, development and construction (e.g. clearing of forests for hotels, bungalows, cabin, golf courses), vandalism, changes in population dynamics, the transmission of diseases to wildlife (Farrell and Marion, 2001; Wenjun, 2004; Cosgrove *et al.*, 2005), accidental introduction of exotic species, disturbance of feeding, breeding, and behavioural patterns (Cosgrove *et al.*, 2005).

Generally accepting that ecotourism can generate some negative environmental impacts, most academicians and policy makers, in order to provide solutions, turn their attention to the determination of acceptable level of impact and carrying capacity, monitoring and controlling the tourists’ behaviours, maximizing the local support and minimizing the possibility of local population’s active reaction against the ecotourism. Disappointed with the negative outcomes, some researchers recommend prescriptive, ethical and normative solutions that clearly demonstrate the existence of serious problems:

“Club-med style hotels should not be able to peddle their mega-structures under the façade that they are offering an ‘environmentally friendly’ adventure. Tougher restrictions should be placed on all kinds of ‘alternative tourism’ to ensure that the objectives of tourism are fulfilled. The benefits should go to the local people, not foreign investors, and a

major priority should be on the conservation of the environment. There should be mandated prerequisites for successful local participation in ecotourism projects and initiative” (Cosgrove *et al.*, 2005).

7. Explanations about Managing and Regulating the Activity: Local empowerment and role of state institutions

The World Tourism Organization and many scholars (Fennell, 2003; Scheyvens, 2003; Jamal and Stronza, 2009; Stone and Stone, 2011) state that ecotourism is community-based tourism that is managed by the local people, with the benefits going mainly to the community. Such opinion assumes that local communities have control (or can have control) and power via empowerment and self-sufficiency in ecotourism process. None of such statements on local participation and management has valid bases, because local life is the integral part of the national life and it is organized according to power structure and around organized interests in the community and nation. One or two local investors in cooperation with regional or national tourism agencies and tour operators do not constitute the community. These neopopulist rhetorical evaluations and language of probability (or normative statements) such as “can, should or must” function as means of mystification, creation of factoids, forged images and false expectations.

It is generally stated that the local people know exactly how much negative impact results from tourism development, yet they overuse local tourism resources due to, e.g. a lack of education, environmental awareness and cooperative management. So, many scholars suggest remedies based on education of local people. Some others (Nyaupane, Morais and Dowler, 2006; Butcher, 2008) advocate that the actual community involvement towards ecotourism development should be restricted because local people lack “suitable capacity in the community for planning, coordinating and investing in tourism resources”.

Conclusion

The study concludes that dominant ideological discourse on ecotourism scientifically fails in explaining the nature of a host of interrelated activities called ecotourism, because majority of dominant explanations are put forward by academicians who have certain ideological and private interests in doing so and by people who are in public administration, public relations, advertising, propaganda and tourism. They present the theoretical descriptions as facts; make the functional exceptions rule, offer strategically prescriptive and normative ethics and principles that are unattainable but functional in mind and interest management. Some explanations are explicitly after creating false images about the nature of relations and business in ecotourism. Others knowingly or unknowingly confuse the fact with fiction, fact with forged normative/prescriptive principles. Normative and prescriptive evaluations can only play the role of diversion, deliberate agenda setting, and neutralization of the negative feelings. They all intentionally or unintentionally ignore and/or hide the fact that the widely propagated notion of ecotourism is deeply embedded in the logics of ideological, discursive and relational normalization of corporate activities, commodity circulation, technological end-product diffusion and global governance of the economic, political and cultural market conditions. Furthermore,

They ignore the most crucial issues such as commodification, structured power relations and role of organized private interests and profit maximization, surplus

creation and economic exploitation, and impossibility of local empowerment under capitalist mode of relations.

Furthermore, the concept of sustainability is misrepresented: Sustainability is the sustainability of capitalist structure and organized relations via new technologies, policies and mind management practices. The ultimate objective in creating and employing the functional myths about industrial practices is sustainability in production of goods, services and people who can produce and consume these same goods and services in daily practices. As marketing scheme (Ross and Wall, 1999, p. 124) and one of the nicely knitted industrial activities with forged claims, “eco-tourism, which is basically practiced in the orthodox tourism mould often masquerades as alternative tourism” (Sreekumar and Parayil, 2002, p. 531).

The dominant idea of ecotourism nicely fits in the sustainable development notion: There are poor, conventional and economically inactive local communities. These communities need jobs and products of modern life. Ecotourism is one of their saviours: Ecotourism brings the opportunities of welfare to the local communities. What they have to do is simply to participate in the action for development. State institutions and governments, international finance and lending institutions and corporations all over the world promote ecotourism as one of the ways of local wealth, safety, security, longevity and welfare. Thus, the global practices of economic and cultural domination are transformed into providing goods and services for the benefit of all. This forged reality is vehemently supported thorough daily discourses by governments, politicians, academicians, corporations and mass media, and by the other rhetorical discourses about environment, globalization, privatization, free market, individual freedom, sustainability and development, serves the systemic requirements of politics of the globalizing industrial structures.

The good/bad news is that millions of studies are hardly ever used by the industrial decision-makers. However they have a crucial role in the control of knowledge production and distribution in such a way that interests of thousands of academicians and millions of students are directed away from the critical inquiry and questioning the nature of the industrial and political hegemonic practices. Existing tourism policies and practices should be re-evaluated, and legal regulations should be renewed in terms of environmental and social outcomes, not in terms of overtly and covertly upholding industrial interests. Can all these be realized? Hardly ever; because these kinds of discourses and expectations fall outside the goals, modes and relations of organized production, distribution and consumption in our times.

While providing some critical insights on the dominant notion of ecotourism, this article raises numerous questions that require further research on the nature and outcome of research orientations and explanations of industrial practices.

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