

INTERNATIONAL ECO-TOURISM WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION

Ludmila Radchenko, O.O. Romanova

*The Poltava National Technical University
named in honour Yuriy Kondratyuk*

Tourism is by some estimates the world's biggest industry; it's certainly among the fastest-growing, and few believe the events of Sept. 11 will cause anything more than a downward blip on a steep upward curve. In 1950 there were around 25 million international tourist visits. Currently there are around 700 million. By 2020 there will be around 1.6 billion. As it has grown, so have its destructive effects become manifest, and these are greater than most of us might suspect. Along with television, tourism is one of the most potent agents of globalization -- tourists are the shock troops of Western-style capitalism, distributing social and psychological viruses just as effectively as earlier colonists spread smallpox, measles and TB in their wake. And as with globalization, there are voices urging reform.

The year 2002 has been designated the International Year of Eco-tourism by the UN. Eco-tourism is, supposedly, the antidote to mass tourism -- small-scale, nature-based, environmentally-friendly. That's the theory, anyway. The reality is that no-one has properly defined eco-tourism, no-one really knows what it means, it's highly unlikely that anyone ever will define it in a way that will command assent from critics of the industry, and in this vacuum the marketing men, green washers, corporate developers and government spin doctors flourish. We have heard a casino in Laos described as eco-tourism -- because it was sited in untouched countryside.

According to Tourism Concern, the British-based non-governmental organization, much eco-tourism relies on places from which native people have been excluded, often forcibly, or which are being destroyed by the sheer number of tourists. A UNESCO report recently concluded that the World Heritage site of Macchu Picchu in Peru (where a cable car has been proposed to cater to the 350,000 "eco-tourists" who visit it each year) has reached saturation point. Villagers there who want a greater share of tourist revenues have protested by blocking access to the site. Can any phenomenon which so breaches ideas of carrying capacity justify the prefix "eco"?

The non-profit Eco-Tourism Society describes eco-tourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people".

"Environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy, study and appreciate nature and any accompanying cultural features that promote conservation, have a negative visitation impact and provide for substantial beneficial active socioeconomic involvement of local populations." — Hector Ceballos-Lascurian, International Consultancy on Ecotourism.

From these definitions, we have established that eco-tourism does not have the impacts of large scale development, is centered on the ecology of the site, is responsible travel that conserves nature and sustains local people, and is culturally and economically beneficial to local populations. With this more comprehensive definition of eco-tourism, my goal is to question the reality of eco-tourism as a sustainable development alternative within the broader context of globalization.

As the world has become smaller due to the effects of globalization and advances in travel information and technology, world wide travel has become open to the middle classes in most industrial societies. Due to this new found accessibility, tourism is one of the fastest growing spheres in the world today, generating \$416 billion world wide last year. Tourism is expected to increase 235% in the Middle East, 194% for the Pacific Island Nations, 141% for South East Asia and China, 106% for Eastern Europe, 75% for Africa, 60% for Latin America, 36% for the Caribbean, 33% for Australia, Japan, and New Zealand and 30% for the United States. Within the tourism industry, eco-tourism is expanding quickly, and is expected to increase 25%

every year for the next ten years world wide (Herliczek, 1996). The prime eco - tourist destinations are located in developing countries that still possess unspoiled wildlife and hope to offer an exotic experience.

As the world has become smaller due to the effects of globalization and advances in travel information and technology, world wide travel has become open to the middle classes in most industrial societies. Due to this new found accessibility, tourism is one of the fastest growing spheres in the world today, generating \$416 billion world wide last year. Tourism is expected to increase 235% in the Middle East, 194% for the Pacific Island Nations, 141% for South East Asia and China, 106% for Eastern Europe, 75% for Africa, 60% for Latin America, 36% for the Caribbean, 33% for Australia, Japan, and New Zealand and 30% for the United States. Within the tourism industry, eco - tourism is expanding quickly, and is expected to increase 25% every year for the next ten years world wide . The prime eco - tourist destinations are located in developing countries that still possess unspoiled wildlife and hope to offer an exotic experience.

Eco - tourism is a niche market within the tourism industry and exists as a sustainable alternative to large scale development. As a niche market, eco - tourism targets a very specific group, primarily the middle to upper middle classes of the first world nations. Most eco - tourist participants have annual incomes between \$60,000 - \$130,000 per year per family and have completed at least one collegiate degree revealing that while eco - tourism may attract the well educated it is not an elitist market . Travel costs have opened up widely in the past few years making world travel open to the middle classes. The new found ability for the common man to travel almost anywhere in the world while staying within a pre - determined budget has caused the profit margins of the cruise lines and luxury hotels to decline as the market opened to more varied demand for alternative experiences.

More specifically, eco - tourism ideally can provide financial support to local communities in the form of jobs. This additional revenue can be then put back into the communities for the development of infrastructure and education. Another option is to put revenue back into preserving and conserving the resource base in order to sustain the eco - tourism venture. In addition, eco - tourism can add to the GNP of the country at the national level, by attracting foreign currency that holds more weight in international markets than national currency . By investing in tourism, the national government is getting more value for every tourist dollar spent in the country as compared to the same amount spent in local currency. Often, eco - tourism provides a more sustainable option when faced with traditional development models like deforestation.

Unfortunately, if eco - tourism ventures are not planned and managed with long term goals or the local community in mind, the resource base will soon be exploited putting an end to the eco - tourism project. Conflicting management objectives can lead to a lack of efficiency, inadequate funds can cause problems with enforcement capability, and badly organized programs often fail to reach a sustainable solution. In addition, the benefits of eco - tourism projects are seldom felt beyond the immediate community surrounding the tourist destination resulting in islands of affluence in a sea of poverty . While eco - tourism may increase the number of jobs, the number of well paying jobs is still relatively small due to language skill requirements. In most developing countries obtaining language capability requires high levels of education which is generally not available to the majority.

Like eco - tourism, globalization is an emerging phenomenon that is loaded with ambiguities in reference to its meaning and application. The debate is intensified when the significance and impact of globalization is considered. At the most general level, globalization has been defined as the multiplicity of linkages and interconnections between the states and societies which make up the modern world. The process by which events, decisions, and activities in one part of the world can come to have significant consequences for individuals and communities in quite distant parts of the globe . Economically, globalization refers to the viability of the world trading system, the apparent decline of national economic policy autonomy, the impact of the technological revolution, and the sources of long term and short term economic growth . The significance of the globalization process engenders a wide range of speculations as well. Reich argues that

we are living through a transformation that will rearrange the politics and economics of the coming century. There will be no national products for technologies, no national corporations, no national industries.

While globalization has opened the tourism market around the globe, the increased marginalization it has caused between the south and the north has also led to the creation of a more aware consumer. The impacts of globalization are beginning to be realized, and in some developing nations the impacts are not positive. Eco - tourism in its original sense is a direct response to this marginalization, attempting to take advantage of the opportunities globalization has offered the first world, while bringing previously unrealized benefits to the more marginalized third world as well. Eco - tourism offers a niche to attract private investors that will invest in infrastructure, technology, and labor training in order to realize greater profits in the long run. In addition, it offers an alternative to such destructive and further marginalizing development options as deforestation if done sustainably.

Eco - tourism is also highly related to the concepts of sustainable development and globalization. Globalization created a suitable international economic environment allowing the concept of eco - tourism to evolve. Made possible by the world wide advances in information technology, telecommunications and transportation, tourism in general became available to the middle classes. As more people began to take advantage of the new found accessibility to travel around the world, the environmental, cultural and economic impact began to take its toll. Eco - tourism arose as a sustainable development alternative to the detrimental environmental, economic, and cultural impacts being felt by developing nations.