TOURISMOS: AN INTERNATIONAL MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF TOURISM
Volume 9, Number 1, Spring 2014, pp. 145-165
UDC: 338.48+640(050)

THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE FUTURE OF TOURISM

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Under the neoliberal economic model promulgated by the International Monetary Fund, many countries such as Costa Rica have changed economic policy to emphasize international tourism. With the increase in tourist arrivals, tourism is considered a major generator of foreign exchange but with externalities subsidized through degradation of local environments. Such development is considered inefficient and unsustainable resource use. Eco-tourism is environmentally friendly due to its small-scale, community based, and reliant on local commodities. Eco-tourism is significant in a world of increasingly scarce natural resources and environmental degradation. A world of environmental limitations requires a shift in tourist modalities. The policy challenge is to decentralize the tourist sector and reorient towards broad-based eco-tourism.

Keywords: *Eco-tourism, environmental degradation, sustainability, community development*

JEL Classification: *L83, M1, O1*

INTRODUCTION

As countries such as Costa Rica and Cuba strive to lessen the social and economic impact on the health of the environment, tourism must be examined for its effect on environmental degradation. The literature is clear that mass, conventional resort tourism has a generally negative impact on the environment and local communities (Dasenbrock, 2002; Davies and Cahill, 2000; Thomas-Hope and Jardine-Comrie, n.d; Grandoit, 2005). It is also clear from environmentalists such as James Speth (2008) and Jim Hansen (2010) that the environmental crisis is deep, pervasive, and can no longer sustain "business as usual." As Speth put it,

"we are running out of environment" (2008: 100). Environmental degradation and growing limitations on resource exploitation call for a new perspective for the tourist industry. One alternative strategy in Costa Rica has been to integrate tourism with environmental concern centered on ecotourism. Ecotourism's potential, however, is predicated upon the state's willingness to recognize the significant and essential role played by empowered local communities. This paper argues that ecotourism offers several benefits including mitigating environmental degradation, empowering local communities, providing sustainable employment opportunities, and providing a more meaningful and "holistic" experience for tourist and host. Ecotourism also has the potential adapt to a future world of environmental limitations of resource scarcity.

THE GROWTH OF TOURISM

Cultural encounter between groups either out of curiosity or for political or economic reasons is as old as our species. Culture contact is perhaps the most significant change agent for much of human history. One of the earliest travelers was the Greek historian Herodotus who visited various areas on North Africa and Egypt in the fifth century BC. Early Europe, in the twelfth-fourteenth centuries for example, witnessed many scholars who traveled to educational institutions in England, France, and Italy for academic pursuits. Perhaps the most intrepid of early European travelers was Marco Polo and his thirteenth century travels through Central and East Asia. Encounters such as the above were instituted for practical economic or research interests rather than purely for leisure reasons.

Mathieson and Wall offer a definition of tourism as "the temporary movement of people to destinations outside their normal places of work and residence, the activities undertaken during their stay in those destinations, and the facilities created to cater to their needs" (1982: 1). True tourism, however, did not begin in earnest until the sixteen through nineteenth centuries when the political and economic elite of Europe sent their sons (and daughters) on the "Grand Tour" of European capitals to broaden their education and/or improve their social graces. As a consequence of the Enlightenment, Black suggests that science and philosophy were beginning to see foreign travel as a significant element in the quest of knowledge and cross-cultural awareness (1992). The Grand Tour follows as a modern equivalent of the Roman pattern where

wealthy individuals would visit Greece and Egypt for personal edification (Gyr, 2010).

Large-scale commercial tourism began in the second half of the nineteenth century as more reliable transportation systems and technologies developed. By the 1840s, Thomas Cook began offering all-inclusive travel to South and East Asia to the general population. By the 1890s, Cook was booking thousands of travelers for his trips that included one around the world tour. By the beginning of the twentieth century in the United States, for instance, travel for pleasure to see "the sights," such as the Grand Canyon or Yosemite Park was increasingly popular among the middle classes as travel amenities increased and travel costs fell. The aftermath of World War II and the booming post-war economy in the United States saw a further increase in middle class travel to international destinations. The era of commercial mass tourism was about to begin as the middle class experienced greater disposable income, improved communications technologies gave access to “exotic” foreign locations, cheaper air transportation and sophisticated regional tourist infrastructure development.

The nature, meaning, and composition of tourism is related to the economic and technological circumstances of the period in which it develops. As a more mature consumer culture develops, the satisfaction of desires and the pursuit of pleasure evolve into a ethos of great power. Advertising is increasingly sophisticated and pervasive in defining the meaning of the good life and the standard of living organized around the amount of consumption we engage in. Advertising suggests that through consumption one gains self-assurance of identity status on the one hand, and through foreign-based tourist consumption the simulacrum of being globalized.

Contemporary international tourism relies on the ability to develop intricate long-distance supply lines, intense terra-forming of local habitats and ecosystems, and the increase of large scale manufacturing of commodities. The investment, production, distribution and consumption of tourist related commodities accounts for over nine percent of world GDP in 2011, according to the WTTC (2011). In their latest report, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) estimates that international tourism composes one of the great economic sectors of the world economy, employing 255 million people and generating over US$6.3 trillion in GDP (WTTC, 2011). There is literally not a place on this earth

that is not in some fashion involved with tourism and the supply chains that support it.

TOURISM AS A NEOLIBERAL DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVE

For many resource poor countries of the Caribbean commercial tourist development is seen as a significant means of generating foreign exchange. Multilateral agencies such as the International Monetary Fund promote tourism as a development alternative. Such development appears attractive since there are numerous multinational companies with the experience, resources, and technology for developing tourist retreats. For many Caribbean nations that produce agricultural commodities of limited value-added, tourism is an attractive alternative. Found throughout the Caribbean and Central America are massive resort establishments such as Montego Bay in Jamaica, Guanacaste in Costa Rica, Punta Cana in Dominican Republic and Rodney Bay in St. Lucia. Tourism is class based with tourist operations such as Apple bringing in plane loads of middle class tourists to all-inclusive destinations as well as exclusive elite establishments such as found in Soufriere, St. Lucia and Roatan, Honduras.

Throughout the Caribbean the low-skilled labor intensive nature of tourism means that the industry takes advantage of the available cheap labor force. For average earning per hour, of eight sectors listed by Jules in his St. Lucia study, five pay more than hotels and restaurants (2005: 22). Tourist employment tends to be seasonal, often menial with low wages and limited benefits or protections. Employment levels are also susceptible to downturns due to various disasters, conflicts and socio-political instability. As in Tijuana, Mexico, and the Caribbean coastal areas of Costa Rica, many people do not earn sufficient wages in a relatively expensive economy where most goods are imported due in part to an extremely anemic domestic industry. Historically, to circumvent the lack of adequate employment opportunities inhabitants of St. Lucia, for example, could migrate to Canada or Great Britain. Migration to these countries today is much more difficult and no longer operates as a "release valve" for those desperate for work.

Polly Pattullo's investigation of Caribbean tourism lead her to ask the central question: who benefits from this growth? Her answer is that the industry remains essentially under foreign control. It is mostly foreigners who operate the airlines and cruise ships, own most of the resorts and

hotels, and own or control tour operations and food imports (1996). Most revenue generated by tourism escapes the island and is repatriated abroad. Helen Bain estimated that 75% of revenue leaves the Caribbean (2007: 27) while for St. Lucia in particular the loss is over 56% (Jules, 2005: 6). The degree of leakage is due in part to the lack of strong backward links to the local economy. The problem of limited usage of local resources is due, as the Caribbean Development Bank pointed out, to the "high price of local produce, due in part to small scale of production, inconsistency of supply and poor quality of products were also deterrents to reliance on local supplies" (Bain, 2007: 27). Furthermore, most countries cannot provide the capital or technological inputs needed to construct and maintain a modern resort.

For all-inclusive resorts and package deals, most of what is consumed is imported from abroad rather than procured locally, including most agricultural produce such as orange juice, tomatoes, and chicken. In an attempt to capture as much leakage as possible St. Lucia has instituted a program to encourage agricultural production to satisfy the needs of resorts, hotels and restaurants. The Sandals Group of resorts has agreed to work with St. Lucian farmers to improve produce to substitute imports (Bain, 2007; Jules, 2005). In the Dominican Republic, Law 69 mandates that companies must consider local sourcing when products are essentially the same in cost and quality (World Bank, 2010). In the Dominican Republic, for example, the Partnership for Ecologically Sustainable Coastal Areas is supported by the Punta Cana area resorts.

While the growth of the tourist industry has provided an alternative to the traditional focus on agriculture, it nevertheless is a form of direct foreign investment dependency in which it is foreign capital that controls most of the industry. In this case, both capital and tourist are sensitive to events such as the twin towers attack on September 11th, the SARs outbreak, or the recent global recession which has had a dramatic effect on tourist visitation. A significant major outcome of these events is in the area of employment where St. Lucia experienced a surge in unemployment after the events of September 11th. Thus the major risk of market-led direct foreign investment is the ease of capital and tourist flight.

THE SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL COSTS OF TOURISM

Most tourist resorts, such as those owned by Sandals or Melia, are immediately familiar to most visitors. All the amenities of home are to be found such as air conditioning, the same sort of bathroom configuration, internet, television, toiletries, and familiar food. The materials used in the construction of rooms, galleries, dining area and kitchen are generally of world-class luxury standards. The final cost of resort development may be in the tens of millions of dollars, not including the government revenue for infrastructure. Many, if not most, of the resorts I have visited generally are able to accommodate many hundreds if not thousands at a time.

The construction of large-scale tourist resorts have a tremendous environmental impact. The amount of construction material that has to be imported from overseas are expensive as are the food, blankets, towels, televisions, radios, etc. Due to fiscal policies there are various import and exchange rate costs that must be borne by the host government. Additionally, new infrastructure must be constructed in support of the resort: highways, water treatment, sewage treatment, and improvement or linking of local electrical needs to the national grid. Depending on the location, other costs may include air and water pollution, beach or river dredging, land dispossession of local inhabitants, habitat destruction including coral reefs and mangrove swamps. These costs to accommodate the international tourist are negative externalities that come either out of limited local budgets or through loans from agencies such as the IMF or regional Inter-development Banks. These costs are presented to the public as national development plans in the best interest of the country. In Costa Rica the large tourist establishments are very powerful and have considerable influence over relevant policy. For instance, the government's Costa Rica Tourist Institute has designed a green certification program to encourage tourist establishments to be environmentally sensitive. However, there is reported considerable "greenwashing" where businesses engage in superficial efforts of minimal environmental benefit in order to receive a green certificate (Roberto Sanchez, personal communication).

There is a series of external cost not borne by the multinational resort is the often unplanned worker settlements that grow up around the resort area. McMinn and Cater provide an example of such tourist-based overdevelopment for the town of San Pedro in Belize (1998) and Edwards

outlines the same unplanned squatter settlements for Jamaica (2009). The creation of such communities can lead to soil erosion, destruction of watersheds, and habitat destruction. These costs as well as providing physical service such as sewage and electricity are costs covered by government expenditure or local alternatives, if covered at all.

Traditional commercial tourism also has social costs that affect the degree of environmental sustainability possible. Foreign tourists also arrive with a cultural package of motivations and expectations. In "Anthropology of Tourism," Amanda Stronza quotes Valene Smith who defines a tourist as a "temporarily leisured person who voluntarily visits a place away from home for the purpose of experiencing a change" (2002: 265). Who are these tourists and what do they seek? To visit a foreign resort is to be placed in a "liminal" state between two worlds where often the conventional rules that govern social life are perceived not to be operant. Stronza refers to modern tourism as the "anti structure of life" in which the tourist attempts to escape from something rather than a search for something meaningful (2002). Tourism can represent a form of freedom from Max Weber's "iron cage" of everyday life, of meaningless and demanding jobs and the stress of modern living with its constant demand for consumption. Commercial tourism presents a fantasy world of food, drink, sunny beaches, and entertainment.

Dean MacCannell, a pioneer in the culture of tourism, sees modern life as one of inauthentic commercialism that leads to forms of alienation and thus a quest for some approximation of authenticity elsewhere. However, he believes this gives "rise to a modern form of alienation of individuals interested only in the model of the life-style, not in the life it represents" (1976: 32). In this regard, the tourist is interested in the moment, the superficiality of some supposed authenticity of experience. The tourist approaches the foreign destination and its attractions not essentially to learn about the other in any substantive way but to be entertained, excited by the exotic, and allowed to forget that the "iron cage" that awaits him or her back home. For instance, Sandals Resorts entices a get-away luxury experience,

"Come experience the very pinnacle of all-inclusive excellence in the Caribbean. Sandals delights couples in love with supremely luxurious accommodations, gourmet candlelit dining for two, gorgeous tropical settings and some of the world's most exquisite beaches in Jamaica, St. Lucia, Antigua, and the Bahamas."

The Paradisus Punta Cana Resort offers an all-inclusive stay with 11 restaurants, nine bars, a casino, spa, "action park" and an exclusive golf course. The caribbean.com website beckons the tired, harried potential tourist: "Welcome to the Caribbean Sea and hundreds of tropical Caribbean Islands some call paradise. As befits heaven-on-earth, there is much to enjoy, see and do. Beaches, boats, banks and bikinis are Caribbean vacation essentials." The world of the "all-inclusive" resort with its packaged tourist attractions, all-you-can-eat and drink, the luxury of room service, and maids to clean up is of critical importance to the majority of tourists. Such tourism is about a certain experience and feeling rather than a quest for knowledge and understanding of those beyond their parochial horizon.

Many resorts, however, do offer adjunct packaged eco-adventures into the forests and mountains in the surrounding vicinity or what Luis Vivanco calls the "pleasure periphery" (2006: 176). In areas of Monte Verde and Santa Elena, Costa Rica, you find zip-lines, Tarzan Swings, canopy bridges, and all-terrain rental vehicles to thrill the visitor interacting with the cloud forests. The residual of such experience are the stories and photographs that support your out-of-context and transitory experience for your friends back home. What is lost, if not carefully husbanded with additional knowledge, is the experience as a link in creating and preserving a healthy and diverse environment in the consciousness of the visitor.

I have witnessed many local/indigenous events enacted for the bused-in tourist group and question what is it the tourist perceives or understands. Without an understanding of the social and cultural context of place and history, what is comprehended beyond the initial commodified experience? Wendy Hillman suggests that once local or indigenous objects or events becomes the focus of the tourist's gaze, that object or event becomes a commodity, that is, a unit measured by the economy (n.d.). She adds, that this "value is normally gauged by a monetary worth... this devalues the meaning and significance for indigenous populations and possibly its authentic value for tourists" (ibid). The presented culture and heritage loses its meaning in its original sense to those viewing the performance and is therefore transformed into a commoditization, a facsimile of its original self. Two years ago in Panama City, Panama, I met a young Kuna woman dressed in her traditional cloths and I asked to take her picture. She said yes, for a US dollar. Certainly a "pseudo-event," as Daniel Boorstin put it, but did it

have substantive meaning, especially for the Kuna woman? "Worldwide, we are seeing the transformation of cultures," writing Davydd Greenwood in the early days of international tourism, "into 'local color,' making peoples' cultures extensions of the modern mass media. Culture is being packaged, priced, and sold like building lots...as the tourist industry promises that the world is his/hers to use" (1977). Greenwood's assessment is most valid when the culture activity (dance, art, etc.) is extracted out of its native environment and exhibited in a "sterile" setting.

Locals attempt to satisfy the touristic demand and as a result often re-conceptualize the meaning of authenticity. A sense of negotiation plays out in which both local and tourist may have a satisfying experience but which changes the original non-tourist context. Many observers of the impact of tourism such as Deborah McLaren believe this to be the case. McLaren suggests that "Local people must compete for tourist dollars and sometimes exploit each other or their cultures and environments for short-term economic benefits. This is especially true when locals market their history, ceremonies, religion, and culture" (1998: 47). This marketing, according to McLaren, often overlooks the realities of poverty and hardship of local people and tends to idealize, for the benefit of the tourist, their culture. For example, on a recent trip to Cuba I attended a dance performance where various costumed dancers whirled around in colorful robes. The audience was impressed by the energy, color and dance routine of the performance. There was, however, no background information on the meaning of the performance. I happened to be sitting next to a Cuban American who informed me that the dancers were representations of various Orishis gods and that the dance was about love, betrayal and the moral issues involved. Without her commentary the performance would have been meaningless. Additionally, the tourist brings a set of values and expectations that inform tourist perception. The encounter between tourist and local, then, is what Boorstin refers to as a "pseudo-event" in which the tourist sees what they choose to see, not what they should see (Stronza, 2001: 271). LePree concurs with this observation stating, "This happens not only as a result of the marketing strategies employed that glorify the cultural 'other,' but is also occurring due to the host culture's own adoption of the commoditization paradigm in order to sell their cultural tourism product" (2008-09: 70).

This diminution of heritage and cultural identity cannot be challenged by those locals who work within the traditional tourist site. They often

are part of the exotic and almost invisible background as maids, cooks, servers, gardeners, etc. This is not to say, of course, that the encounter between host and tourist is always negative or leads to questioning one's cultural identity (see, for example, Nash and Smith, 1991; Gmelch, 2003). But much of the interchange between tourist and local is more on a transitory or superficial level engaging in incidental pleasantries. The question is what is the meaning and outcome of the interchange between tourist and local? Addressing this exchange, Stuart Hall states that "...identity is always a question of producing in the future an account of the past, that is to say it is always about narrative, the stories which cultures tell themselves about who they are and where they come from" (1995: 5). When communities control the exchange they determine the content of the narrative. True understanding comes from the exchange of stories about which one is culturally and politically, and the historic or contemporary context behind the narratives. This ability to interact and exchange narratives of meaning has a greater opportunity of expression within a localized, small-scale ecotourism environment than within such an all-encompassing resort experience where the idling bus is waiting to take one back to the resort. It is not only a question of who constructs the narrative but also under what conditions that narrative is conveyed.

It is clear to many that mass commercialized tourism is not environmentally or culturally sustainable. The concentration of tourists and their consumption activities place a serious burden on the environment. This includes increased social waste disposal, air and water pollution, traffic congestion, and interference with local land and water habitats. Such concentrations of money may lead to such social problems as prostitution, increased introduction of alcohol and drugs, and crime. Unless the government provides significant oversight these conditions lead to a diminution of the quality of local life.

ECOTOURISM, COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT, AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Ecotourism is seen as an alternative experience for discerning tourists seeking a more meaningful encounter in another cultural milieu. Ecotourism is defined as, "purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the culture and natural history of the environment; taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem; producing economic opportunities that make the conservation of natural resources beneficial to local people"

(Caren, 2000: 221). Ecotourism fulfills the need for sustainability but, as Joshua LePree explains, includes the added dimension of an interpretive experience of the local ecology (2008-09: 59). The definition used in this paper includes human ecology and the impact of tourism on local culture, social structure and environment. It is in many cases more than just adventure but a search for understanding. The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) estimates that by 2004, ecotourism was growing three times faster than conventional mass tourism (online at www.ecotourism.org). Ecotourism is at the forefront of the tourist industry with Costa Rica (followed by Belize) as the model.

Ideally, the construction of eco-friendly structures minimizes the impact on the land, trees and animal habitat. At the same time, businesses are encouraged to utilize biodegradable and local building materials as well as purchase goods from local farmers, fishermen, and craftsmen. The effect of such actions is to create backward linkages into the local economy providing employment, less expensive inputs, and allowing others to "buy in" as stakeholders to the idea of ecotourist development. Ecotourism provides a greater opportunity to disperse tourists over a wider area thus mitigating the environmental problems associated with catering to dense populations (Dasenbock, 2002). Dispersal also creates more opportunity for more local people over a wider area. This can have a further synergistic effect of creating more service employment.

Stem, Lassole, Lee and Deshler add that "community self-determination and participation" along with a emphasis on local, small-scale development is critical (2003: 323). Guy Marris emphasizes that communities must have an active and direct participation in the management of ecotourist activities and establishments (2001). Such community-based development differs from mass commercialized tourism in that it is generally small-scale utilizing when possible local resources and relying on a more intimate and substantive contact between host and guest. Often the hotels and restaurants are locally owned and usually take on a more distinctive or authentic appearance based on local culture and tastes. For many ecotourist establishments there is a confluence of business and lifestyle, that is, a way of living. The International Ecotourism Society estimates that while almost 80% of revenue from all-inclusive resorts is captured by foreign actors, the Society believes up to 95% of revenue by ecotourism remains in the locality and region. Small, locally owned establishments tend to buy locally. The Society suggests further that ecotourists spend more money,

an estimated $90 per day versus $62 per day by beach holiday visitors (online at www.ecotourism.org).

A focus on community as agent encourages a sense of empowerment among local inhabitants. Such empowerment involves the growth of "knowledge, confidence, power, skills, and access to knowledge" that enables locals to effectively take charge of their communities (Pleno, 2006). The idea of empowerment centers on the ability of communities to increase control over their lives. Empowerment necessarily involves renegotiating with the state to increase independence to take action aimed at social and political change. In other words, to the degree possible communities should engage in self-organizing and power-sharing (in terms of opportunities, benefits, and decisions) with a minimum of state control. In the case of tourism, it is the ability to determine the contours of how to meet the expectations of the tourist within a context of local cultural meaning. If the tourist experience is not made up of discrete and disjointed parts but takes place in a more "holistic" in-depth atmosphere of localism, then the tourist has the chance to understand the complexities of the meaning and relationship between nature and community. This understanding can be seen as a reification or affirmation of the empowered community. Within the confines of mass tourism, however, the mundaneness or difference of everyday community is not very relevant and are "not promoted as worth viewing," as one hotel owner told Vivanco, "...we don't have culture here for people to see. The attraction we sell here is nature" (2006: 164-165). This statement reflects the lack of a sense of empowerment, the idea of self-worth and the uniqueness of local communities.

The mass tourist is out of context but the ecotourist comes with a different "mindset" in that part of the experience is to understand the local cultural and environmental context. The ecotourist is, in a sense, interested in a more holistic encounter. In Costa Rica more opportunities exist for understanding the reality of what people do. For example, a visit to the Asociación Comisión de Mujeres Indigenas de Talamanca one learns about this rural matrilineal society that operates an organic cocoa plantation through discussions (questions and answers) of chocolate production, how their society works, and the issues, obstacles and opportunities they face as a business and an indigenous community. Another example is CoopeSarapiqui, a fair trade coffee cooperative. Several hours is spent learning how the coop is structured, its relationship to surrounding small coffee fincas, and the business of producing and

selling coffee as a cooperative. The guide discusses the life of the coffee tree, the water reclamation ponds that also function to grow fish that is sold in their cafe, and the "green belt" that surrounds the coop's land. But is this not still the "tourist gaze?" No, because the context of the visit is not contrived but "real," and the visit but a small interruption of the coop's daily routine of making a living.

Two experiences in Costa Rica exemplify the difference in two types of ecotourism. In the first case there is an ecolodge at the edge of Tortuguero National Park that offers an eco-experience resplendent with foods mostly catered to foreign tastes, a swimming pool with bar, and gasoline power watercraft for traveling into the park. The second is a locally family owned hotel that was part of the pueblo of Tortuguero which served local foods under more rustic surroundings, and simple but clean rooms. In the village there are opportunities for chance encounters with locals. In the latter case, at the hotel we had dinner and discussion with a women's activist group to talk about Tortuguero's development and their role in the community as women. The ecolodge, on the other hand, was isolated from the local population by a river as well as by a defined meaning of ecology that is divorced from a natural history that includes the local people who have lived near the park for decades.

ECOTOURISM AND THE CHALLENGES TO THE STATE

Small island developing nations often have few alternative means of generating foreign exchange. With the decline in the value-added for many tropical crops on the international market and the collapse of various preferential programs such as the Lomé Convention, many nations turn to international tourism. The growth of popularity of ecotourism or nature tourism has many governments "marketing" green tourism for the revenue it generates. Everybody wants to feel good about their environmental footprint and this is recognized by government and the tourist industry in their marketing campaigns. Costa Rica's slogan is "No Artificial Ingredients," and is meant to suggest pristine environments, wholesome nature, and personal health. Such advertising campaign can potentially lead the influx of tourists to love such pristine and wholesome places to death but not recognize the social reality behind such beauty.

A significant responsibility of the state is to safeguard its environmental patrimony and at the same time develop resources for the generation of revenue. Environmental sustainability is an expression of a

country's development strategy and, as in the case of Costa Rica for instance, sustainability is often in conflict with the need to generate revenue exploiting resources rather than conserving them. The goal of development traditionally involved increasing the Gross Domestic Production, that is, the wealth generated by economic activity. Traditional development, however, has not been effective in alleviating poverty or advance community growth. Recognizing the impasse of conventional efforts, James Speth suggests that a more inclusive idea of development is needed. "True development," he concluded "requires profound institutional changes that empower poor people to contribute to and benefit from the economy… It entails investing in the human, social, environmental, and physical assets of the poor, expanding their access to productive resources, social services and basic infrastructure" (1999: 16). Ecotourism as community development offers an effective alternative to the chronic misdirection of conventional development. Experience suggests that local inhabitants and eco-establishments intuitively understand that striving for short-term gain instead of long-term health means squandering limited and precious resources.

The state, however, must provide leadership and resources to help nurture ecotourism. Such leadership must be nuanced, focused yet sensitive to the structure and dynamics of the community. An example of the role government should play is found in the development of "communal councils" in Venezuela (Bain, 2008). Communal councils are community based bodies that are charged with the responsibility to take charge of their own local development. Community groups with little experience and divergent interests are provided workshops in proposal writing, governance, and management. There is a process for seeking administrative help when needed. I have visited communal councils on two visits to Venezuela and realize that some councils are very effective and some are not, but what is significant is that they are attempting community coalescence and empowerment within a history of state domination.

Developing a sense of common ground and common destiny is not easy but with proper leadership and government support such unique organizations are capable of managing much of their own development needs. The state, in other words, cannot approach the nurturing of ecotourism as "business as usual." In this regard, Weinberg, Bellows and Ekster warns that "the problems are known to local communities and public officials. The challenges are also technologically fixable and

economically viable. The obstacles are political. The communities exist in larger political systems that lack the capacity to control economic action. In other words, the political process is not capable of keeping the economic system in check" (2002: 378). This may be true if the state sees ecotourism as just another source of generating revenue and feels threatened by the prospect of community empowerment.

The consequence of empowerment may be a willingness to confront the state, or the elites that dominant the state, in terms of policy. Observers such as Eva Garen (2000) find the Costa Rican state either indifferent or holding different and contradictory positions (via Costa Rica as a green paradise) on preserving the environment. Cattle ranching, banana and pineapple plantations, and logging remain critical sources of revenue even though they are very destructive of the environment and local communities. The success of empowerment can be viewed as dangerous to a state desiring to implement its ideas of development without resistance by civic society. In Puerto Viejo, Costa Rica, I met with a local women's group that was successful in blocking plans for a large, upscale marina to be built near the town. While the marina would have serviced the boating elite, the activists believed that the few jobs created would be vastly off-set by environmental degradation to the coastal waters as well as greater air pollution in the town. Such a sense of empowerment is a powerful lesson to those who have been convinced previously of their political marginality (Pleno, 2006).

This new form of ecotourism, one which is integrated into the culture and psychology of cross-cultural contact between host and tourist, addresses the need for community development, employment, and poverty alleviation. Its effect has the potential to create more substantive linkages with the domestic economy as well as unleashing the creative energies of local inhabitants. Whereas control over costs, wages, and development are often in the hands of resort multinational companies, a diverse, de-centered ecotourist economy is controlled by local interests and empowered communities. The contributors to the book, Alternatives to Economic Globalization, see this process as one of "localization." The authors call for policies that are local in nature and "increase democratic control of the economy by communities... to achieve maximum self-reliance nationally and regionally in a way that ensures more sustainable forms of development" (Cavanagh & Mander, 2004: 110). They add that "the greater the self-reliance of a community or nation, the greater the scope for local flexibility and adaptation to local circumstances" (ibid:

10). Resort based commercialized tourism meets the needs of corporate interests while local-based (eco- or cultural) tourism meets the needs of community.

CONCLUSION: A NEW CONSCIOUSNESS IN A WORLD OF LIMITATIONS

Clearly tourism has an important role to play in cross-cultural communications and in personal connections between different cultures. But at the same time tourism based on mass consumption and environmental despoliation is dysfunctional and in the long-run unaffordable. Recognizing the economic and environmental transformations on the horizon, it is plausible to assume that three great trends are moving toward an intersection of the three: environmental collapse, capitalist economic dysfunction, and consumer-induced cultural alienation. The result is an end of a capitalist oriented hegemonic epoch similar to the ending of European feudalism in the fifteen century. It appears that we may be entering an era of another "great transformation," as the German economic historian Karl Polanyi put it. The capitalist age that Polanyi wrote about has led to an ever-increasing exploitation of and alienation from the natural world.

According to Vic Cox, "The United States, with four percent of the world's population, accounts for 22% of world energy consumption. Its per capita consumption is 14 times greater, and CO2 emissions rate 18 times greater, than the low-income countries with 41% of the world's population" (2001). The limitations of our natural environment, from water, minerals, habitat to global climate change, means that our global consumption patterns is increasingly problematic. Speth quotes Vaclav Havel's conclusion of where we stand. "It's fascinating to me," Havel writes, "how preoccupied people are today with catastrophic prognoses, how books containing evidence of impending crises become bestsellers, but how very little account we take of these threats in our everyday activities..." (Speth, 2008: 200). The power of the hegemony of economic growth and expansion can be seen in recent attempts to dismantle the Environmental Protection Agency's environmental rules and regulations as well as the agency's ability to research and plan for climate change (New York Times, 2011). The contemporary ethos of capitalism to expand and accumulate profit through ever-increasing consumption as

expressed by mass resort tourism is beyond the limitations of finite resources.

The North American Hopi Indians have a word for the state of the global environment and the capitalist economic/cultural structure that support it. The Hopi word, Koyaanisqatsi, means life out of balance or life disintegrating. According to Speth, capitalism and its associated values perpetuate a bias that "favor the present over the future and the private over the public... [and where] values today are strongly materialistic... [placing] high priority on meeting human needs through ever-increasing purchase of material goods and services" (ibid: 61, 62). Inherent in capitalism is a rapaciousness of physical and human resources-- nature is a resource and humans are consumers-- in which short-term gain trumps long-term costs (Roberts, 2012; McKibben, 2011). It does so through the values of profit, wealth, growth, competition, and material possession. At a point in history when resources were plentiful these values were conducive to economic and social development. This has led to a process of economic and environmental imperialism. "The forces that we are concerned with," Berry declares, "have control not simply over the human component of the planet but over the planet itself, considered as an assemblage of natural resources available to whatever human establishment proves itself capable of possession and exploitation" (1999: 146). In this evolving era of limitations, however, this worldview and its values have become dysfunctional.

The result, Speth argues, is that consumerism and materialism presents an "approach to life and social wellbeing that elevates the material conditions of life over the spiritual and social dimensions" (2008: 147). In this regard we lose connection to community, history and to ourselves. We then seek solace in the superficial or transitory pleasures such as brought on by mass tourism. In our search, David Korten tells us, "We pursue money as a measure of our worth, go shopping to distract us from our loneliness, dominate and destroy to affirm our existence" and embrace dogmas "that affirm the disabilities of our alienation..." (2006: 253). Leonardo Boff, a leading Latin American liberation theologian, believes that "we are currently living a great crisis. It is a crisis of the civilization; by this, I mean a crisis of the global meaning of our existence in this world" (2003: 47). There are many who see the need for a new consciousness to replace a cultural worldview no longer compatible with the economic and environmental needs of the future (Raskin, 2002; Korten, 2006; McKibben, 2011; Berry, 1999).

In the transition to a new world of limitations the values of individualism and consumerism are dysfunctional. In his look to the future, Paul Raskin sees a "great transition," one that "envisions a profound change in the character of civilization in response to planetary challenges" (2002: 54). Thomas Berry agrees that we entering a period of transition, one he refers to as the Ecozoic Era. "We are now experiencing a moment of significance' he writes, "far beyond what any of us can imagine. What can be said is that the foundations of a new historical period, the Ecozoic Era, have been established in every realm of human affairs" (1999: 201). The future limitations of scarcity, he continues, means that the industrial technological "paradise" is slowly being replaced with an understanding and need for a "mutually enhancing human presence within an ever-renewing organic-based Earth community" (ibid). Ecotourism, I believe, offers the potential to feed the human spirit for connection and meaning to both the natural world as well as the cultural world of distant local inhabitants in this new era.

What does tourism mean or what should it be about. Is it to fulfill hedonistic pleasure as a form of escapism or a means toward self-actualization through social connection? Many observers suggest a cultural, environmental and economic crisis, one finding expression in mass resort tourism. It does not feed the human spirit but only the value of consumption and distracted pleasure beyond Weber's "iron cage." At one moment in contemporary history this system could be absorbed. But McKibben believes that moment of hedonistic expression is no longer viable. In a new world of environmental limitations, eco-tourism offers the potential for self-actualized cross-cultural contact. As capitalism must be transformed to save the global environment, so too must tourism be transformed to meet a future new world and new way of being.

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SUBMITTED: APR 2013
REVISION SUBMITTED: OCT 2013
ACCEPTED: FEB 2014
REFEREED ANONYMOUSLY

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