Exploring the Certification of Ecotourism Ventures as a Tool for Sustainable Development

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in
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by
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ABSTRACT

Exploring the Certification of Ecotourism Ventures as a Tool for Sustainable Development

A thesis presented to the Graduate Program in Global Studies

Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
Brandeis University
Waltham, Massachusetts

By Alyssa Irizarry

The tourism industry has experienced sustained and exponential growth, a trend expected to continue in the years to come. Today, tourism is one of the leading contributors to the world economy. It is capable of producing both positive and negative social, economic and environmental effects. The concept of ecotourism was born out of a need for tourism that supported and enhanced the positive influences of the industry and minimized the negative. Over time the term ecotourism became diluted to a mere marketing ploy. Certification was introduced as a means of identifying businesses in adherence with responsible business practices and principles. The purpose of this thesis is to explore the use of certification in upholding the values of “real” ecotourism and therefore sustainable development in structure and practice.

This question was addressed through a focused look at two pioneering certification programs, Kenya’s Eco-Rating Certification Program and Costa Rica’s Certification for Sustainable Tourism. The study was conducted through a review of scholarly literature supplemented by multilateral organization reporting, web based research, my graduate coursework, and personal travel experience. An exploration of the history of the tourism industry
and its positive and negative environmental, social and economic effects sets the foundation for a review of Kenya and Costa Rica’s certification programs. Through an analysis and critical review structured in accordance with Martha Honey’s seven characteristics of ecotourism I found that these certifications do adhere to the values of ecotourism and therefore sustainable development in structure but not in practice. The potential for certification to serve as a tool for sustainable development exists and I offer recommendations on how to work toward fulfilling that potential.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviations</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Outline</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Problem</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms &amp; Concepts</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Context: A Brief History of the Tourism Industry</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One: The Effects of Tourism</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Effects of Tourism – Positive</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Effects of Tourism – Negative</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Effects of Tourism – Positive</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Effects of Tourism - Negative</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Effects of Tourism – Positive</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Effects of Tourism – Negative</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two: Ecotourism &amp; Certification</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecotourism</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenwashing &amp; Ecotourism Lite</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certification</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Business Case for Certification</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism of Certification</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three: Case Studies</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kenya</strong></td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eco-Rating Certification Program</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campi ya Kanzi</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basecamp Masai Mara</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism of the Eco-Rating Certification Program</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Costa Rica</strong></td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certification for Sustainable Tourism</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lapa Rios</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism of CST</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Four: Analysis &amp; Recommendations</strong></td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Review</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10YFP</td>
<td>10-Year Framework of Programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAA</td>
<td>American Automobile Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASA</td>
<td>Advertising Standard Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASTA</td>
<td>American Society of Travel Agents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CREST</td>
<td>Center for Responsible Travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CST</td>
<td>Certification for Sustainable Tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSC</td>
<td>Forest Stewardship Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GATS</td>
<td>General Agreement on Trade in Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEF</td>
<td>Global Environment Facility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSTC</td>
<td>Global Sustainable Tourism Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Costa Rican Tourism Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDB</td>
<td>Inter-American Development Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISO</td>
<td>International Organization for Standardization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KTF</td>
<td>Kenya Tourism Federation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MINAE</td>
<td>Environment and Energy Ministry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MWCT</td>
<td>Maasai Wilderness Conservation Trust</td>
</tr>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
</tr>
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<td>OAS</td>
<td>Organization of American States</td>
</tr>
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<td>SCP</td>
<td>Sustainable Consumption and Production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SINAC</td>
<td>National System of Protected Areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TBL</td>
<td>Triple Bottom Line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIES</td>
<td>The International Ecotourism Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNEP</td>
<td>United Nations Environment Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNWTO</td>
<td>United Nations World Tourism Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world. While it is capable of producing positive social, economic and environmental effects, it is also capable of causing great damage. Ecotourism emerged as a type of tourism, meant to encapsulate the positive and minimize the negative consequences of the industry by adhering to the principles of sustainable development. However, as the term “ecotourism” gained in popularity, businesses began co-opting it as a popular catchphrase while ignoring its defining values. The need to identify true ecotourism from those practicing in name only became evident. Certification of tourism has been developed as a means of formalizing clear, sustainable practices and as an incentive to hoteliers and others to adhere to them.

In this paper I examine the claims that certification has the potential to recognize “real” ecotourism, and to encourage more tourism businesses to engage in best practices. Through a comparative analysis I describe how two ecotourism destination pioneers, Kenya and Costa Rica, have incorporated certification into their tourism industries, aiming to inculcate the values of sustainability into tourism practice. I also seek to determine if this practice has affected positive change in their respective national tourism industries.

The need to move tourism towards sustainable practices, and identifying effective tools in which to do so, continues to grow along with the industry and its economic, socio-cultural and environmental contributions, both negative and positive. Tourism is a vital source of economic production for many countries, including Kenya and Costa Rica. Protecting the attractions,
natural, cultural or otherwise, that draw in visitors, is essential in maintaining the industry and the positive attributes that come along with it, such as employment opportunities. An important aspect of maintaining the tourism industry is ensuring that locals affected by it are also benefiting economically and are respected in regard to the local culture and society. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has identified sustainable tourism as a feature in the following Sustainable Development Goals:

• Goal 8: “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”
• Goal 12: “Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns”
• Goal 14: “Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development”

(Setting the Foundations, 2015, p.12, Sustainable Development Goals, n.d.)

There has been plentiful discussion on the topic of tourism certification by experts in the industry. Most of this discussion took place before the creation of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), a certification accreditation organization founded in 2008 through the collaborative efforts of industry experts as well as organizations such as the United Nation World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). GSTC was created to address the issue of a proliferation of certifying programs with varying best practices and methods of assessment. There lacks a comprehensive follow up on tourism certification after GSTC was enacted and began its work.

The comprehensive literature found on the topic of certification dates back to 2007 and 2008. This was part of my rationale on reviewing this topic, to learn more and examine the current state of tourism certification and to assess what effect it has had in renowned ecotourism destinations.

I also have a love of travel and deep respect for nature and conservation. I have seen up close
both positive and negative consequences of tourism, from visiting well maintained and sustainably managed national parks to experiencing tour operators that have illegally fed wildlife and offered up local people as photo subjects to please their customers. This subject is also of interest professionally, as I consider a career change to work in the tourism industry.

One of the difficulties of analyzing the tourism industry is that it includes a wide array of services and activities. For the purpose of this paper I will be focusing on certification as it pertains to tourism accommodations. This is an area of sustainable tourism that is addressed most frequently through certification, including the GSTC criteria, and therefore provided the basis for a thorough comparative study. I will be comparing Kenya’s Eco-Rating Certification Program and Costa Rica’s Certification for Sustainable Tourism. I chose these countries because tourism contributes significantly to their respective economies, they have well developed, government-led tourism agencies, and both have developed their own certification programming based on GSTC criteria. They are renowned destinations to view wildlife and are widely discussed and analyzed as examples of countries where ecotourism has flourished.

**Chapter Outline**

The paper begins by laying the foundation of how the tourism industry has evolved to its current state. Chapter One describes the environmental, social and economic effects of the industry today. Chapter Two discusses the need for sustainability in the industry, a need recognized by most major industry players, and a focus on the triple bottom line and the concept of sustainable tourism. This section goes on to discuss the sub-category of sustainable tourism and the main focus of this paper: ecotourism. I then discuss the differences between “real” ecotourism and ineffective practices mimicking ecotourism known as “greenwashing” and “ecotourism lite”. Certification is introduced as a means of identifying and rewarding “real”
ecotourism. I discuss how certification in tourism has evolved to where it stands today, including establishment of the certification accreditation body, the Global Sustainable Tourism Council. This is followed by the business case for certification and criticism of certification in the industry.

Chapter Three consists of case studies on certification programs in Kenya and Costa Rica, including sub-case studies on businesses that have achieved certification in these countries and what their sustainability practices entail. Chapter Four brings us to the analysis and recommendations. The analysis is based on Martha Honey’s “Ecotourism Scorecard” system, referenced in her book *Ecotourism and Sustainable Development: Who Owns Paradise?*. This provides the basis for analyzing the certification programs and how they align to the seven characteristics of ecotourism, as defined by Martha Honey.

I found that overall the certification programs in Kenya and Costa Rica do align well with Honey’s Ecotourism Scorecard framework. However, I also found that the programs have not been proven to be an effective means of supporting sustainable development. It is difficult to make such an assessment largely because there is a lack of data, a relatively small sample size to study, and a lack of awareness of the programs on the part of the consumer to prove otherwise. I conclude my paper with recommendations to the GSTC on how data collection should be systematized to help future researchers better assess the impact of GSTC-approved certification programs.

**Methods**

The main method used was a literature review on the topics of ecotourism, sustainable development and tourism certification. Industry experts Martha Honey, Amos Bien, Robert Toth and Michael Conroy authored my main sources of literature. Web-based research supplemented
this, providing facts and figures on various aspects of the tourism industry (size, impacts), certification program details and country-specific data. Sources of great value included the United Nations World Tourism Organization, the Tourism & Travel Council, the Center for Responsible Travel and The International Ecotourism Society. I also drew upon my coursework at Brandeis University, specifically Tourism & Development and Integrated Conservation and Development, as well as my own personal travel experience.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Research Problem**

Martha Honey notes “ecotourism has been hailed as a panacea”; a means of supporting the values of sustainable development (Honey, 2008, p. 4). However, as the ecotourism industry grew and its brand became distorted, certification was introduced as a method by which to identify “real” ecotourism from practices such as “greenwashing” and “ecotourism lite”. It is timely, therefore, to ask the question, have certification programs proven themselves effective at upholding the values of “real” ecotourism and therefore sustainable development both in structure and in practice? I aim to address this question through a focused look at two pioneering certification programs, Kenya’s Eco-Rating Certification Program and Costa Rica’s Certification for Sustainable Tourism.

**Definition of Terms & Concepts**

The following are important terms and concepts as they are defined in this paper: 

*Accreditation:*

Accreditation is defined as “the procedure by which an authoritative body formally recognizes that a certifier is competent to carry out specific tasks” (Honey, 2002, pp. 5–6).
Certification:

Martha Honey defines certification as:

“a procedure that audits and gives written assurance that a facility, product, process, service, or management system meets specific standards. It awards a logo or seal to those that meet or exceed baseline criteria or standards that are prescribed by the program” (Honey, 2002, pp. 4–5).

Ecotourism:

In this paper I have used the definition of ecotourism as Martha Honey identifies it, which is based on the definition by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES). It is as follows:

“travel to fragile, pristine, and usually protected areas that strives to be low impact and (often) small scale. It helps the traveler, provides funds for conservation, directly benefits the economic and political empowerment of local communities, and fosters respect for different cultures and for human rights” (Honey, 2008, p.33).

Seven Characteristics of Ecotourism:

Martha Honey describes authentic ecotourism as adhering to the following seven characteristics:

- Involves travel to natural destinations
- Minimizes impact
- Builds environmental awareness
- Provides direct financial benefits for conservation
- Provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people
- Respects local culture
- Supports human rights and democratic movements

(2008, pp. 30–31)

Sustainable Development:

As defined by the 1987 United Nations World Commission on Environment and Sustainability, sustainable development is:

“development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (“General Assembly of the United Nations,” n.d.).

Sustainable Tourism:

The UNWTO defines sustainable tourism as:

“Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities” (“Definition | Sustainable Development of Tourism,” n.d.).
Historical Context: A Brief History of the Tourism Industry

There is documented evidence of tourism beginning in ancient Egyptian and Grecian civilizations. Ancient Egyptians traveled to see the pyramids, much as modern tourists do today (Gyr, 2010). Ancient Greeks traveled for religious reasons, to participate in music festivals and sports competitions, such as the Olympic Games, and to conduct research (Gyr, 2010). The notion of going on a vacation or holiday dates back over 2,000 years to ancient Rome when wealthy citizens would trade the city for the coast and country during the summer season (Watson, n.d.). The introduction of a well-established system of roads, with 90,000 km of major thoroughfares and 200,000 km of rural roads, was the catalyst for ancient Romans to travel with relative ease to enjoy different areas of their land (Gyr, 2010). A tourism economy developed to provide travel booking, accommodations, meals and entertainment for Rome’s wealthiest citizens. This came to an end as the Roman Empire faltered; infrastructure broke down and the safety of travel diminished.

The tourism industry rose again in the medieval era as pilgrimages and the movement of merchants, scholars, soldiers, and students created the need for outlets in which to house, feed and guide travelers as they made their way to their destination (Gyr, 2010). Watson references Chaucer’s The Canterbury Tales as evidence that pilgrimages often included relaxation and fun on the way to the holy site noting that the word “holiday” comes from the “Old English word hāligdæg (holy day)” (n.d.). In the 12th century travel became a means of finding oneself, becoming educated to the ways of the world, and visiting important educational institutions. Gyr describes the period between the 16th and 18th centuries as “an early form and precursor of modern tourism” (2010). These years brought the tradition of young nobles traveling as a means of education, honing social graces, and improving language skills. Typically these journeys were
over a year long, involved extensive planning, and an entourage of staff to attend to the young noble’s every need. (Gyr, 2010). Travel at this time was a demonstration of one’s social status and wealth.

Educational travel evolved to include the upper middle class beginning at the Enlightenment and into the 19th century. During this time other socioeconomic classes began to take short journeys to cities or the countryside nearby (Gyr, 2010). Interest in travel moved from art and culture to technology, trade, industry, and manufacturing as an entrepreneurial class with an interest to expand their knowledge and business opportunities grew. As the middle class joined in travel the upper class’ desire to differentiate themselves resulted in the creation of luxury travel destinations, more exclusive and expensive than what was previously available.

Beginning in the early 19th century modern tourism was born with the advent of the railway hailed by Gyr as the “midwife at the birth of modern mass tourism” (2010). The development and accessibility of modern systems of transport such as the train and the steamship revolutionized travel in Europe. Industrialization brought to a head this phenomenon as urbanization, demographic changes, social and labor rights, and a rise in income brought travel for leisure to the masses. Guidebooks and travel literature gained in popularity and importance helping to define tourist destinations and attractions. Thomas Cook offered the first all-inclusive trips for the middle class, supplying meals and entertainment, and including vouchers for hotels and tourist brochures (Gyr, 2010). Mountaineering and adventure travel arrived in the late 19th century, highlighting an appreciation for nature, a new form of sociability, and featuring an appreciation for the local population and culture (Gyr, 2010).

The first half of the 20th century brought leisure time to all, as guaranteed paid time off was codified into law in most industrialized nations. Gyr describes the post-world war tourism
period as an “enormous boom…bound up with economic growth, technological progress, a high level of competition and the creation of new destinations and travelling styles” (2010). In the 1960s, commercial aviation became available to the masses and an increase in disposable income expanded the ability and desire to travel for millions of people. These factors created the modern economic powerhouse of tourism we see today. According to the UNWTO, “international tourist arrivals have increased from 25 million globally in 1950, to 278 million in 1980, 674 million in 2000, and 1,186 million in 2015” with “virtually uninterrupted growth” (“UNWTO Tourism Highlights,” 2016, p. 2).

By 2015 tourism provided 1 in every 11 jobs in the world, 10% of the global GDP and 7% of the world’s exports (“UNWTO Tourism Highlights,” 2016, p. 2). Tourism exports ranked 3rd behind “fuels and chemicals and ahead of food and automotive products” (“UNWTO Tourism Highlights,” 2016, p. 2). In 2015, 53% of tourism was reported as for leisure, 14% for business, 27% for visiting friends, relatives or for religious or health reasons, and 6% was not specified (“UNWTO Tourism Highlights,” 2016, p. 4). Western Europe, the United States and China continued their dominance over the tourism industry in 2015. France, the United States and Spain brought in the most international tourist arrivals and the United States, China and Spain brought in the most money earned from international tourism (“UNWTO Tourism Highlights,” 2016, p. 6). 4 out of 5 international tourist arrivals took place within the traveler’s own region. The UNWTO also noted that while “advanced” economies typically dominate the industry, specifically in Western Europe, the rise in disposable income in “emerging” economies has led to increased tourism growth in Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America (2016, p.12).
These statistics have a greater or lesser effect on any given country depending on what the staples of their economy are. For example, in the Bahamas, tourism encompasses 60% of the country’s GDP and is the most important driver of the country’s economy (“About The Industry,” n.d.). An estimated 50%, of the country’s citizens are employed in tourism (“About The Industry,” n.d.). The Bahamas reaps great benefits from its prosperous tourism industry. It helps bring in American dollars, which are then used to import goods and food, helps to strengthen the Bahamas dollar, allows citizens to send their children abroad for school, and provides funding for government salaries as well as building and maintaining infrastructure (“About The Industry,” n.d.). This is in contrast to a country such as Canada, which has a more diversified economy reliant on manufacturing, oil, and utilities production (“Canada,” n.d.). The tourism industry accounted for only 2% of Canada’s GDP in 2014 (“Industry Overview,” 2013).

The industry is expected to grow as tourism becomes more accessible, the human population continues to expand, and our world further settles into its globalized state. The UNWTO issued a report, Tourism Towards 2030, for the UN General Assembly in 2011 that was the result of three years of research on forecasting the tourism industry through 2030. The report forecasts sustained growth for tourism resulting in an average increase in international tourist arrivals of 43 million a year between 2010 and 2030 (“UNWTO Tourism Toward 2030,” 2011, p. 5). This means by 2030, 1.8 billion international tourist arrivals will cross borders, about 5 million people per day; 4 times that amount will travel domestically (“UNWTO Tourism Toward 2030,” 2011, p. 5). Tourism to emerging economies will see the fastest growth, double the pace of advanced economies. As stated in Tourism Towards 2030, “in 1980, 70% of international arrivals were recorded in the traditional destinations of the advanced, industrialised and diversified economies of North America, Europe, and Asia and the Pacific” (2011, p.15). In
2030, 58% will be recorded in the emerging economy destinations of Asia, Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, Eastern Mediterranean Europe, the Middle East and Africa” (“UNWTO Tourism Toward 2030,” 2011, p.15).

South Asia is expected to grow the fastest at +6% per year, followed closely by West and Central Africa at +5.9% and East Africa at +5.8%; North American will grow the slowest at +1.7% per year (“UNWTO Tourism Toward 2030,” 2011, p.18). These numbers are a reflection on how developed this industry already is in these respective nations. The highest rate of outbound arrivals also stems from Asia and Africa, Africa has an expected growth rate of 5.7% per year (“UNWTO Tourism Toward 2030,” 2011, p.23). The Tourism Towards 2030 report took into account three different scenarios that may affect the forecasted growth: “slower than expected recovery from 2008 – 2009 crisis in the short term, and lower growth in global GDP into the medium term”, a faster increase in transportation costs, and a continued decline, the same as the current rate, of transportation costs (2011, p.30). In all three scenarios, tourism growth is still expected to only increase over time, the most drastic scenario resulted in international arrivals at 1.4 billion in 2030, or 22% less than what is forecasted (“UNWTO Tourism Toward 2030,” 2011, p.30). As the tourism sector is forecasted to experience rapid and prolonged growth it is important to understand the social, economic and environmental ramifications to local, national and international communities.
Chapter One: The Effects of Tourism

Environmental Effects of Tourism – Positive

The UNEP describes the positive effects of tourism as increased financial contributions toward conservation, improved environmental management and planning, environmental awareness raising, increased conservation practices, eco-friendly employment creation, and an increase in regulatory measures (“Tourism and Environmental Conservation,” n.d.). Financial contributions are either direct, for example, generated through a park entry fee, or indirect from government contributions generated through hunting and fishing licensing fees or tax revenue (“Tourism and Environmental Conservation,” n.d.). Many organizations, both governmental and non-profit, offer environmental management and planning guidelines to increase the benefits rendered from sound tourism planning. These guidelines are at times required and enforced through regulatory measures, such as the restriction in the Galapagos Islands on how many ships can cruise the area at any given time (“Tourism and Environmental Conservation,” n.d.).

Increased protection and conservation of areas or wildlife can be a by-product of tourism as well. The value of a location in regard to tourism can serve as an incentive to maintain and protect it through the creation of a national or wildlife park. In Uganda, the establishment of a $250 USD gorilla tracking permit has generated nearly $3 million USD annually from tours to 3 habituated gorilla families (“Tourism and Environmental Conservation,” n.d.). This has served as a source of funding for the protection of this endangered species as well as development projects in the region (“Tourism and Environmental Conservation,” n.d.). In Costa Rica, where tourism is
a significant contributor to the country’s economy, an estimated 25% of the land is under protection, thereby safeguarding its value to the tourism industry (“Tourism and Environmental Conservation,” n.d.). Tourism can also provide an environmentally friendly alternative form of employment. The UNEP provides an example in Bohorok, Indonesia, where the creation of an orangutan viewing center has provided employment and education on the importance of the animal for the local population. The area has seen a drop in timber exploitation, poaching and trade of wildlife as a result of this alternative employment opportunity and education (“Tourism and Environmental Conservation,” n.d.).

The UNEP notes the ability to raise awareness and appreciation for the environment and conservation through tourism activities (“Tourism and Environmental Conservation,” n.d.). Programs such as bringing local school children in Honduras to the La Tigra cloud forest visitor center, an activity funded through tourism revenue, can affect long-term change by cultivating an interest in the environment and nature at an early age (“Tourism and Environmental Conservation,” n.d.). The promotion of such activities also aligns with the practices and principles of sustainable consumption, defined as “building consumer demand for products that have been made using cleaner production techniques, and for services - including tourism services - that are provided in a way that minimizes environmental impacts” (“Tourism and Environmental Conservation,” n.d.).

Environmental Effects of Tourism – Negative

The United Nations Environment Programme notes, “negative impacts from tourism occur when the level of visitor use is greater than the environment’s ability to cope with this use within the acceptable limits of change” (“Tourism’s Three Main Impact Areas,” n.d.). This is also referred to as an area surpassing its “carrying capacity”, defined as “the maximum
population, level of activity, or number of users that can be sustained by an ecosystem or natural resource without endangering its character or quality over time” (Howard, n.d.). The repercussions of exceeding the carrying capacity of an area can have a dire effect on resources that may already be scarce or limited such as “water, energy, food and natural habitat area” (“Negative Impacts of Tourism,” n.d.) The UNEP outlines three main environmental areas of negative impact from the tourism industry: natural resources, pollution and physical impacts (“Tourism’s Three Main Impact Areas,” n.d.).

Fresh water is a resource of limited availability in many popular tourism destinations. In some areas, the demand for fresh water increases exponentially due to tourism as the majority of tourists come from Western nations bringing with them the Western culture of water usage. The Global Water Forum describes tourism as “a major user of freshwater in areas where water is scarce or where renewal rates of aquifers are limited…its contribution to water consumption can be nationally and regionally significant” (“Global Water Forum | Tourism and water,” n.d.). In coastal areas of the Mediterranean and the Caribbean, tourism is the primary reason for water use, in small nations such as Barbados it can account for over 7% of the nation’s water (“Global Water Forum | Tourism and water,” n.d.). This is especially true in resort destinations in dry climates that provide luxuries such as golf courses and swimming pools, which require large amounts of water and care. It takes approximately 9.5 billion liters of water a day to maintain the over 32,000 golf courses around the world (“Water & Tourism,” n.d.). Pool and golf course upkeep are in addition to the daily personal water usage per person, water used in construction, and water used for food preparation that most tourism destinations generate as well.

Energy use is also substantial for tourism destinations. Transportation is the largest demand for energy related to tourism, mostly in the form of fossil fuels for air, road, rail and
water travel (Pratt et al., 2011, p.417). This form of energy use continues to grow as transportation becomes more accessible and tourists travel further and for shorter periods of time utilizing modes of transportation that are more energy intensive (e.g. airplanes) (Pratt et al., 2011, p.417). Accommodations are the second most use of energy, especially in destinations that provide climate control such as air conditioning or heat (Pratt et al., 2011, p.417). Light and energy for cooking and cleaning are also a major use of energy for tourism purposes (Pratt et al., 2011, p.417). The report, *Tourism: Investing in energy and resource efficiency*, notes that the average international tourist has a weighted global average energy consumption of 170 MJ per trip, excluding transport and accommodation, in comparison to the world daily energy consumption per capita at 135 MJ (Pratt et al., 2011, p.417). Tourism operations also increase the level of food consumption and other raw materials used, which may already be limited in any given destination.

The amount of pollution generated by tourism is of great concern. Many destinations do not have the infrastructure to process wastewater generated from tourism operations leading to sewage runoff. This can cause damage to the local ecosystem and can negatively affect the health of the local population. Even in high-income countries, such as the Mediterranean region, it is common for hotels to discharge untreated sewage into the sea (Pratt et al., 2011, p.418). Martha Honey states that cruise ships, “largely unregulated and untaxed”, often dump untreated waste into the ocean accounting for 77% of all ship waste (Honey, 2002, p. 13). Improper disposal of wastewater can lead to dangerous health issues or even death; hepatitis, diarrhea, gastroenteritis and many other diseases are caused by ingesting or coming in contact with polluted water (Jamieson et al., 2003, p.23). Untreated wastewater is toxic to marine life and can destroy ecosystems that tourism ventures may depend on, such as coral reef systems. The same is true for
land ecosystems, Jamieson et al. notes, “mountains and hilly areas have fragile, weak ecosystems”, they are intolerant to the conditions created by untreated wastewater resulting in loss of flora and fauna, eutrophication of mountain streams, degradation of mountain slopes and other effects that would ultimately damage the tourism appeal of the location (2003, p.24).

The UNEP states, that solid waste and littering are “environmental, economic, health and aesthetic” problems “affecting all regions around the world” (“Solid Waste and Marine Litter,” n.d.). Similar to wastewater management, many small and/or developing countries do not have the capacity to properly dispose of the large amount of solid waste generated by tourists. Jamieson et al. notes that tourists from the United States produce an average of 2kg/person/day, which is higher than European tourists at 1k/person/day (2003, p.3). Solid waste generated from tourism includes everything from food and beverages (i.e. plastic water bottles), to landscaping (i.e. toxic empty fertilizer bottles), to administrative materials (i.e. brochures) (Jamieson et al., 2003, p.8). If this waste is disposed of irresponsibly it can negatively impact ground water quality and flora and fauna.

The marine ecosystem is deeply affected by the issue of litter; it can be harmful to marine life causing entanglement or ingestion of foreign materials and aesthetically ruin a landscape for enjoyment by locals and tourists alike (“Solid Waste and Marine Litter,” n.d.). The Caribbean Environment Programme states that marine litter is often buoyant and travels long distances, noting, “the amount of plastic pieces in the Pacific has at least tripled in the last ten years (“Solid Waste and Marine Litter,” n.d.). An Ocean Conservancy cleanup of 33,000 miles of shoreline worldwide removed 6 million pounds of debris in one day, 57% from recreational activities, 33% from smoking, 6.3% from fishing, 2% from dumping and 1% of medical and personal hygiene (“Solid Waste and Marine Litter,” n.d.). Often, when waste is improperly disposed of on land, it
will eventually be washed into a waterway, as is the case when open air dumps are overfilled ("Solid Waste and Marine Litter," n.d.).

Air travel has become the norm when it comes to arriving at a tourist destination. 54% of tourists traveled by air to their destination in 2015, that number is expected to increase as the trend in air transport continues to grow faster than that of surface transport ("UNWTO Tourism Highlights," 2016, p. 3). The air travel subsector is currently the second largest of the 25 subsectors of the travel industry, as identified by SelectUSA.gov, and accounts for 17% of total travel and tourism spending ("Travel, Tourism," n.d.). Airlines generated $261 billion in passenger air transportation services in 2014 ("Travel, Tourism," n.d.). The greenhouse gas emissions generated by air travel are considerable. The International Panel on Climate Change estimated that the “direct greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from aviation accounted for 10.62% of global transportation emissions in 2010” (Wilde, n.d., p.2). This included “6.52% of transportation emissions for international aviation and 4.10% of transportation emissions for domestic aviation” (Wilde, n.d., p.2).

This is coupled with greenhouse gas emissions from road and rail travel. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimated in 2015 that transportation accounted for 28% of all greenhouse gas emissions (Wilde, n.d., p.2). The UNWTO reports that 46% of travel occurs by road (39%), rail (2%) and water (5%) ("UNWTO Tourism Highlights," 2016, p. 4.). It can be commonplace for tourism buses to sit with engines running to ensure that the bus stays cool or warm in certain climates, which further increases the amount of energy needed for the travel itself. Tourism can also cause noise and light pollution, which can be disruptive to the local ecosystem and community. Resorts built near species sensitive to light, such as turtles, can
disrupt wildlife. Community members living near airports can suffer from hearing loss from the daily noise of jet engines.

The physical impact to the ecosystem in which tourism is taking place can also be extensive. Land loss and degradation is common, especially in the building of resorts, which often takes place in fragile ecosystems such as mountains and beaches. The construction of facilities can involve “mining, beach and sand dune erosion, soil erosion and extensive paving” and can lead to deforestation and the draining and filling of wetlands (“Tourism’s Three Main Impact Areas,” n.d.). Tourist activities can also cause a significant impact on the ecosystem in which it takes place. In Nepal, a trekker can use four to five kilograms of wood a day in an area that is suffering from deforestation, as well as leave behind litter including items difficult to dispose of such as oxygen tanks and camping equipment (“Tourism’s Three Main Impact Areas,” n.d.).

Irresponsible anchoring of sea vessels can cause damage to coral reef systems in leisure activities such as snorkeling, sport fishing, scuba diving, yachting and cruising (“Tourism’s Three Main Impact Areas,” n.d.). It’s estimated that in 109 countries with coral reefs 90 of them are damaged by cruise ship anchors, sewage, tourists collecting souvenirs and harvesting for sale to tourists (“Ocean Planet: Threats,” n.d.). Unchecked tourism practices can also contribute to all five main threats to biodiversity as listed by the Convention on Biological Diversity and UNEP document Global Biodiversity Outlook 2: habitat change, invasive alien species, pollution and nutrient loading, over-exploitation and climate change (Secretariat, 2006, p.33). The protection and conservation of biodiversity is essential, not only for the ecosystem services it provides, such as providing food and water, regulating floods, providing carbon sequestration, soil formation, etc., but for the reason tourists are often drawn to tourists destinations - to enjoy nature and the
beauty of their surroundings (Secretariat, 2006, p.14). An ecosystem’s functioning depends on biodiversity, defined as “the variability among living organisms from all sources…this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems”; a loss in biodiversity disrupts an ecosystem and leaves it vulnerable (Article 2. Use of Terms, n.d.). Biodiversity is a major economic contributor to most tourist destinations, such as wildlife tourism in Kenya and Great Barrier Reef diving in Australia.

Social Effects of Tourism – Positive

Carole Simm notes, “tourism encourages the preservation of traditional customs, handicrafts and festivals that might otherwise have been allowed to wane, and it creates civic pride. Interchanges between hosts and guests create a better cultural understanding and can also help raise global awareness of issues such as poverty and human rights abuses” (Simm, n.d.). The UNEP discusses the socio-cultural benefits of tourism including “employment creation, income redistribution and poverty alleviation” among others (“Tourism and Socio-Cultural,” n.d.). It can serve as a “force for peace” by bringing people together for cultural exchange and often reducing prejudice and increasing “mutual sympathy and understanding” (“Tourism and Socio-Cultural,” n.d.). This benefit was formalized in 2000, when the “Amman Declaration” was ratified at the Global Summit on Peace through Tourism (“Tourism and Socio-Cultural,” n.d.). 450 world leaders committed “to building a culture of peace through tourism that supports tourism as a fundamental human activity, free of undue restriction and respectful of human differences and cultural diversity” (“Tourism and Socio-Cultural,” n.d.).

Communities may experience rejuvenation in their local culture as events and festivals may draw in tourists. Tourism can also serve to protect and revalue culture and traditions (“Tourism and Socio-Cultural,” n.d.). Communities may see an increase in civic involvement as
members become invested in the tourism potential of the area and assist in planning and
cultivating opportunities to capitalize on this potential (“Tourism and Socio-Cultural,” n.d.). The
UNEP notes the importance of community involvement as a deterrent in not becoming
“passively ruled - or overrun – by tourism” (“Tourism and Socio-Cultural,” n.d.). Community
development is part of sustainable tourism; it is “a process and a capacity to make decisions that
consider the long-term economy, ecology and equity of all communities” (“Tourism and Socio-
Cultural,” n.d.).

The building of new infrastructure can be another social benefit of the tourism industry.
The influx of tax dollars can be used to build and repair public facilities such as “airports,
schools and hospitals, which all support the economic development” of a destination (Bennett,
2014). Jobs created by the building and repair of facilities and infrastructure that supports
tourism can be of powerful economic value. Tourism operations are a job creator, providing
opportunity where they may have been little previous to the introduction of the industry.
Increased employment can also serve to alleviate poverty and allow for income redistribution in
the community.

Social Effects of Tourism - Negative

The United Nations Environment Programme identifies four negative social and cultural
effects of tourism: change or loss of indigenous identity and values, culture clash, physical
influences and ethical issues (“Negative Socio-Cultural,” n.d.). Beginning with the first effect,
commodification of culture entails taking a cultural aspect of a community and turning it into
something for commercial use. This can be a religious ritual, festival, dress or any other aspect of
what culturally defines a people. Once a cultural practice is commodified it can change the
cultural significance and meaning of what that practice originally stood for. An example of this is
ayahuasca tourism in Peru, a commodification of an indigenous ritual for the tourism masses. Ayahuasca tourism now draws people from all over the world that wish to experience this ancient and spiritual ceremony.

The traditional uses of ayahuasca include “magical and religious uses, divination, cultural uses” and use by shamans for healing (Holman, 2010, p. 5). Tourists visiting Peru can now participate in an ayahuasca ceremony as part of all-inclusive packages to the country, often in spiritual lodges conveniently built on the premises of hotels or other tourist accommodations. This has led to the “degradation” of these ceremonies and diminishes the value of what was once a spiritual endeavor of the indigenous community (Holman, 2010, p. 51). The focus is now on the sale of this product to tourists. This is also an example of the loss of authenticity or staged authenticity (“Negative Socio-Cultural,” n.d.). The boom in ayahuasca tourism has led to the rapid commercialization of the practice; ceremonies are sometimes performed by inexperienced shamans, in non-traditional ways.

Standardization is also an aspect of the diminishing of or loss of culture (“Negative Socio-Cultural,” n.d.). Tourist destinations often adopt facilities that tourists find familiar, such as fast-food restaurants like McDonalds and KFC, and hotel chains such as Hilton and Marriot. Such standardization of restaurants and hotels allows a tourist the comfort in knowing what to expect from such name brand entities yet excludes the tourist from experiencing local restaurants and lodging. It also introduces the local population to foreign chains. McDonalds is now in 119 countries, an example of diminishing or overshadowing local culture (“Countries without”, 2013).

Adaptation to the demands of tourists is a means of changing or losing indigenous identity (“Negative Socio-Cultural,” n.d.). Hawaiian luaus, including the performance of the hula...
and fire dancing, were practices of the indigenous people typically reserved for religious or royal significance ("Hawaii Luau History", n.d.). They are now performed regularly for tourists visiting the island to satisfy the demand for viewing and participation in this custom. Adaptation to tourist demands can also be found in the sale of “souvenirs, arts, crafts and cultural manifestations” (“Negative Socio-Cultural,” n.d.). “Molas”, traditional Colombian blouses, are now adapted to patterns and colors popular with tourists instead of maintaining traditional designs (“Negative Socio-Cultural,” n.d.). The focus on selling what is popular with tourists versus maintaining traditional design and interpretation is leading to the loss of such knowledge with the Kuna people that create the molas (“Negative Socio-Cultural,” n.d.).

The second negative effect identified by the United Nations Environment Programme is “culture clash” (“Negative Socio-Cultural,” n.d.). UNEP states, “cultural clashes can take place as a result of differences in cultures, ethnic and religious groups, values and lifestyles, languages, and levels of prosperity” (“Negative Socio-Cultural,” n.d.). UNEP also identifies this as an issue of overexploitation of the “social carrying capacity”, defined as, “limits of acceptable change in the social system inside or around the destination” and the “cultural carrying capacity” (“Negative Socio-Cultural,” n.d.). Cultural carrying capacity is the limit “of acceptable change in the culture of the host population” (“Negative Socio-Cultural,” n.d.).

Sue Beeton explores culture clash through the four stages of Doxey’s Irridex Model of Host Irritation: euphoria, apathy, annoyance and antagonism. She describes a town that has seen a rise in tourism after a popular television show began filming in the area (Beeton, 2006, p. 51). The initial phase of euphoria welcomed tourists to the town. In a year this reaction had evolved into apathy as the presence of tourists was taken for granted and formalized tourism was founded. The next year annoyance set in as the social and cultural carrying capacity of the
community was met. The following year led to the final phase of antagonism. This phase included active resistance, irritation to the tourists’ presence and open challenges to the tourism industry of the town (Beeton, 2006, pp. 52 - 53).

Economic inequality, in regard to culture clash, can be more pronounced as people living in very different economic situations are brought together through tourism. Employees at resorts in Jamaica or Brazil, making an average annual income of $1,200 – $3,000 USD spend much time with clientele that can be making more than $80,000 USD (“Negative Socio-Cultural,” n.d.). The UNEP notes that this can lead to social and ethnic resentment or even copying behavior from those living in less developed countries (“Negative Socio-Cultural,” n.d.). The same tensions can arise from job level friction and income equality in places where locals are typically hired in low paying positions, such as waiters, custodians or housekeepers, while educated foreigners are brought in to take the high-paying managerial work (“Negative Socio-Cultural,” n.d.). The behavior of tourists can also lead to culture clash when tourists are ignorant or uncaring of local tradition or customs, for example, in countries where it is common to dress and act conservatively. Destinations such as Koh Phangnan, Thailand, where infamous and touristy full moon parties take place monthly, can lead locals to weigh the economic incentive of tourism with the annoyance of tourist’s behavior.

The physical influences of tourism can be substantial, including the displacement of people from their homeland and deprivation of access to water, energy and other vital resources. Tourism Concern notes:

“Governments and private companies have forced many tribal peoples from their ancestral lands to make way for national parks and ‘eco-tourism’. Fishing communities are removed from their coastal villages and blocked from accessing the sea as hotels are built and beaches are privatised, destroying livelihoods and traditional ways of life. Informal settlements are bulldozed under beautification projects in the lead up to major international sporting events” (“Displacement caused”, 2014).
Those living in countries that lack land deeds and other legal recourses are particularly vulnerable to displacement. Tourism Concern also cites a case in The Gambia where women line up at 4am to wait for water near private hotels that have a ready supply of water available from private wells unavailable to the public (“New report reveals”, 2012). This is an example of water inequality and deprivation of natural resources.

Crime generation, child labor, and sex tourism are also negative social effects of the tourism industry. Tourism development near impoverished areas such as in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, can lead to an increase in theft as criminals target wealthy tourists in the area (“Negative Socio-Cultural,” n.d.). UNEP cites the International Labour Organization, stating, “13-19 million children and young people below 18 years of age (10-15 percent of all employees in tourism) are employed in the industry worldwide”, not including the informal sector (“Negative Socio-Cultural,” n.d.). These children are “frequently subjected to harsh working and employment conditions” (“Negative Socio-Cultural,” n.d.). Prostitution and sex tourism can become more prevalent in tourist destinations especially in impoverished areas in which participation in the industry can provide much needed income. This industry often leads to human rights violations, abuse, and neglect. This is especially prevalent in the case of child sex tourism, which has become an issue in certain tourist destinations and is supported by a network of “pimps, taxi drivers, hotel staff, brothel owners, entertainment establishments, and tour operators” (“Negative Socio-Cultural,” n.d.).

**Economic Effects of Tourism – Positive**

The positive economic effects of tourism are mostly generated from the vast amount of earnings from the industry: $1,260 billion in 2016 (“Tourism and Economic,” n.d.). According to
the UNWTO 2016 Annual Report, “tourism has virtually uninterrupted growth over time, despite occasional shocks, demonstrating the sector’s strength and resilience” (2016, p. 2). “Tourism expenditures and the export and import of goods and services generate income to the host economy” and “stimulate growth in other economic sectors” according to the UNEP (“Tourism and Economic,” n.d.). The importance of tourism in generating foreign exchange earnings is highlighted by its standing in the top five export categories for 83% of countries and as the main source for 38% of countries (“Tourism and Economic,” n.d.). The industry encompasses 7% of the world’s exports (“UNWTO Tourism Highlights” 2016, p.2).

Tourism can be a contributor to the government both directly and indirectly. Income generated directly is from taxes on tourism employment and businesses and by taxes directly on tourists, such as an entrance fee to a national park (“Tourism and Economic,” n.d.). Indirect contributions are from taxes and duties on good and services related to tourism (“Tourism and Economic,” n.d.). In 2013, the United States National Park Service generated $26.7 billion dollars, which can then be used to maintain or create new infrastructure, facilities and public services (Troutman, 2014). In 2014, the United States National Park Service hosted 292 million visitors, generated $16 billion in “gateway regions” defined as “communities within 60 miles of the park”, and was responsible for 277,000 jobs both directly and indirectly (Goldman, 2015).

The generation of jobs can be a significant positive economic effect of tourism, both directly through hotels and restaurants, and indirectly through supplying goods and services needed for tourism (“Tourism and Economic,” n.d.). The UNEP states, “The World Travel and Tourism Council estimates that tourism generates an indirect contribution equal to 100% of direct tourism expenditures” (“Tourism and Economic,” n.d.). As of 2016 tourism is responsible for 1 in 11 jobs in the world (“UNWTO Tourism Highlights,” 2016, p.3).
Tourism can also make a strong contribution to the local economy. In the case of the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, tourism was referred to as “an engine for development”, a “force for reconstruction” and a means of “bringing income to a region” that took years to recover from the disaster (Cox, n.d.). Contribution to the local economy is often unreported through activities such as street vending and acting as an informal guide (“Tourism and Economic,” n.d.). These local contributions can have a greater effect; the money is often returned to the local economy and has a “great multiplier effect” as it continues to be spent “over and over again” (“Tourism and Economic,” n.d.).

Economic Effects of Tourism – Negative

Galdon, et al. writes, “tourism is a very important tool for economic development. However, its economic effects are mainly conditioned by the level of leakage” (2012, p.759). Galdon, et al. defines leakage as “a portion of tourist expenditures that leaks out in the form of imports and returns to foreign factors of production” or “the failure of tourist spending to remain in the destination economy” (2012, p.761). The UNEP states, “of each US $100 spent on a vacation tour by a tourist from a developed country, only around US $5 actually stays in a developing-country destination's economy” (“Negative Economic,” n.d.).

Import leakage is the result of imported goods or services that the local economy, often in less-developed countries, cannot supply (“Negative Economic,” n.d.). The host country is often “unable to provide reliable, continuous, competitively priced supply of the required product or service and of a consistent quality to meet the market demand” (“The impact of,” n.d.). This is often the case in hotels that provide a higher caliber of accommodation and supply goods and services that would match those of the tourist’s home country. The majority of the money spent to acquire these good and services remains with the export country. The UNEP averages import
leakage for developing countries at 40 – 50% of gross tourism earnings and advanced economies at 10 – 20% (“Negative Economic,” n.d.).

Export leakage typically flows to multinational corporations and large foreign businesses as they have the capital to invest in host country infrastructure and facilities (“Negative Economic,” n.d.). The large businesses and investors financing resorts and hotels, bring profits back to their country of origin (“Negative Economic,” n.d.). Export leakage also encompasses money that may have been spent well before a tourist has left their home country. A majority of their vacation may already have been planned and money spent on airlines, tour operators and travel agents, the majority of which are located outside the host country. Galdon et al. states “only a small portion of the production value of tourism actually stays in the host country, and most tourist expenditure is either sent back to its country of origin (for example, when a tourist purchases imported goods or services) or it never leaves its home country in the first place (such as travel agency commissions, foreign airline tickets and tour operator profits)” (2012, p.760).

Enclave tourism also has negative economic results for the local, regional and national host country communities. The model of the all-inclusive and cruise ship vacations was created to provide the consumer a safe, simple and quality experience at a reasonable price (“All Inclusives,” 2014). It allows, typically foreign owned companies, to manage the total quality of the guest experience as well as “increase their efficiency and predictability of demand” (“All Inclusives,” 2014). Companies operating under this model increase their ability to negotiate and compete with other ventures, driving down prices, and keeping nearly all money spent within the all-inclusive resort or cruise ship. The result is very little trickle down flow of tourism money spent into the hands of local and regional communities. Tourism Concern notes “only 10% of tourist spend from all-inclusive holidays found its way into the regional economy, with even less
reaching the immediate local area”. This has a detrimental effect on local business owners by making it virtually impossible to compete unless there is a direct tie to the enclave tourism in the area (“All Inclusives,” 2014).

The cost of building and maintaining infrastructure vital to the tourism industry can be a negative effect on the local community as well. Investors in the industry have the lobbying power to request public funding to disproportionately support infrastructure projects that benefit tourism rather than education and health care that benefit the entire community (“Negative Economic,” n.d.). Tourism can increase prices for basic goods and services, such as the case of Belize where prices increased 8% and local income remained constant (“Negative Economic,” n.d.). This issue also affects building costs and land value. The development of tourism can lead to an increase in real estate demand that makes it difficult or impossible for locals to become landowners. The result is a dominance of foreign landowners and migration, which “erodes economic opportunities for the locals, eventually disempowering residents” (“Negative Economic,” n.d.). An example of this is Costa Rica where 65% of hotels belong to foreigners and there has been an influx of “amenity migrants” encompassed by retirees and professionals that purchase homes in the area to enjoy the Costa Rican way of life resulting in price hikes in real estate (“Negative Economic,” n.d.).

Economic dependence on tourism can leave a country or region vulnerable to fluctuations in the market caused by natural disasters and economic crises (“Negative Economic,” n.d.). Small, developing countries, such as the Maldives, Seychelles and Jamaica are especially at risk to change. The Maldives employs 83% of its population either directly or indirectly in the tourism industry, followed by Jamaica at 34% and Seychelles at 21% (“Negative Economic,” n.d.). Hawaii’s economy was hard hit in 2009 as a result of economic crises worldwide that
resulted in a 15% drop in tourism, the industry that drives a third of its economy. This resulted in a 10% drop in tax revenue, an $800 million budget deficit and the layoff of more than a thousand public employees (Woo, 2009). The seasonality of the tourism industry can lead to job instability and income insecurity for locals. There is no guarantee that jobs will be available during the next season and training and employment benefits are often hard to come by.
Chapter Two: Ecotourism & Certification

Ecotourism

Tourism is forecasted for uninterrupted growth through 2030. It is one of the world’s largest industries, and has far reaching consequences environmentally, socially and economically. It is vital that the positive outcomes of the industry are capitalized upon and the negative outcomes are addressed and minimized. Moving the tourism industry towards sustainable practices is the focus, or underlining theme, of most agencies, organizations and bureaus that work within or with the industry today. The UNWTO defines sustainable tourism as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities” (“Definition | Sustainable Development of Tourism,” n.d.). Sustainable tourism falls under the umbrella of sustainable development, defined by the 1987 United Nations World Commission on Environment and Sustainability, as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (“General Assembly of the United Nations,” n.d.).

Sustainable development has three main aspects: the environment, social and cultural impact, and economic impact. The goal of the environmental aspect is to minimize the footprint created by tourism, and support conservation. This may mean avoiding damage to flora and fauna by building over a sensitive area rather than through it, or generally avoiding or minimizing negative impact to “flora, fauna, water, soils, energy use and contamination, etc.”
The goal of the socio-cultural aspect is that activities do not bring harm to the community and may support and “revitalize the social structure of culture of the community” (Bien, 2006, p.4). This can be done through practices such as including an indigenous language and teaching the cultural background of an area in tourism activities, preferably by a member of the cultural group. The goal of the economic aspect is that the activity contributes to the economy of the local community; business activities should be beneficial to the owners, employees and neighbors (Bien, 2006, p.4). A means of carrying this out would be to buy local products for amenities, food and/or building materials.

Two indicators have long since measured customer satisfaction in the tourism industry: quality and price, and health and safety conditions. Sustainable tourism adds a third indicator to this measurement (Honey & Stewart, 2002, p. 5). Robert Toth describes this as, “the three-legged stool of customer satisfaction” aligns with the “triple bottom line” (Toth, 2002, p.74).

The Economist credits John Elkington, founder of the British consultancy firm SustainAbility, as the person who coined the phrase “triple bottom line”, or “TBL”, in 1994 (“Triple bottom line,” 2009). The TBL requires a company to consider three different bottom lines: profit, social responsibility and the environment. These are also known as the three Ps: profit, people and planet. As The Economist states, “a company that produces a TBL is taking account of the full cost involved in doing business” and “only when companies measure their social and
environmental impact will we have socially and environmentally responsible organizations” (“Triple bottom line,” 2009). Bien states “a business that is run this way can enhance all three aspects and continue to operate profitably, while benefiting its surrounding natural areas and communities” (2006, p. 5).

The principles of sustainable tourism incorporate the ideal of the triple bottom line and are applicable to all tourism ventures, large or small, in any location. Both large and small ventures are capable of being environmentally and socially responsible and both are equally capable of being irresponsible and unsustainable (Bien, 2006, p. 5). Following an established set of principles aligned with sustainable tourism is in the best interest of a tourism venture. Businesses that rely on a natural resource, such as a coral reef system, for their success should work to protect that resource to secure the future of the business. Businesses in rural or natural areas often require the community’s participation or approval to operate effectively; Akumal, Mexico provides an example of the difficulties that can be faced when the local community is mistreated. Tourists visiting the Rivieria Maya frequent Akumal to view its abundance of sea turtles and beautiful natural surroundings. Large tourism companies have effectively shut out the local community in their ability to earn tourism dollars. The companies coordinate every aspect of a tourist’s trip to Akumal, from pick up, to providing snorkeling gear, food and guides, to drop off. The locals have responded by actively protesting on the road leading to Akumal, blocking the entrance and thus interrupting business for these tourism companies.

In 2005, the UNWTO created a set of twelve goals that relate to the TBL in their publication “Making Tourism More Sustainable: A Guide for Policy Makers” (Bien, 2006, p. 5). They are as follows: economic viability, local prosperity, employment quality, social equity, visitor fulfillment, local control, community wellbeing, cultural richness, physical integrity,
biological diversity, resource efficiency and environmental purity (as cited in Bien, 2006, p.5-6). Economic viability and visitor fulfillment are goals aligned with building a prosperous venture, with a good reputation; they are the most traditional in a business sense. Local prosperity, employment quality and social equity are goals aligned with the economic and social welfare of the community to ensure that members are being treated fairly and that the opportunity to profit in tourism is available to those interested. Local control, community wellbeing and cultural richness align with empowerment and respect of the community and its culture. Physical integrity, biological diversity, environmental purity and resource efficiency align with protection and conservation of natural resources and the local environment so that these resources are continuously available to the community and for tourism.

There are several sub categories of sustainable tourism including nature tourism, cultural tourism, city tourism, beach tourism, adventure tourism, volunteer tourism, etc., the list continues and grows regularly. The focus of this analysis is on ecotourism, defined by Martha Honey as “travel to fragile, pristine, and usually protected areas that strives to be low impact and (often) small scale. It helps the traveler, provides funds for conservation, directly benefits the economic and political empowerment of local communities, and fosters respect for different cultures and for human rights” (2008, p.33). The definition of ecotourism varies slightly depending on the source, the older definitions, such as Martha Honey’s, allude to a small scale and fragile environment. The recent definition from The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) makes no mention of the scale of the tourism venture defining it as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education” (“What is Ecotourism,” n.d.).
There is general consensus that ecotourism involves travel to a natural area, minimizes environmental impact, has an educational component and interpretative features, and brings positive impact to the local community both economically and socio-culturally. Because the definition of ecotourism changes depending on the source, it is difficult to measure its presence in the tourism industry. Further complicating this, as Martha Honey notes, “ecotourism is often claimed to be the most rapidly expanding sector in the tourism industry”, yet it is often grouped together with similar categories of nature, wildlife and adventure tourism (2008, p. 6). However, in 2004 the UNWTO estimated that ecotourism and nature tourism were growing three times faster than the tourism industry as a whole (Honey, 2008, p. 7).

As mass tourism developed in the 20th century, environmental, social and economic issues surrounding, and in some cases resulting from, the industry became evident. Beach resorts and the ideal of the “‘four S’s’ sun, sea, sand and sex” grew in popularity reaching a breaking point when hosts and visitors became disenchanted with this tourism model (Honey, 2008, p. 10). These tourism practices led to negative environmental and social effects; the economic incentives for the local community were negligible (Honey, 2008, p. 10). These negative sentiments culminated in the 1980 Manila Declaration on World Tourism stating “tourism does more harm than good to people and to societies in the Third World” (Honey, 2008, p. 10).

While some host countries became disillusioned with tourism, tourists had begun taking more nature-based trips. In 1998, nature-based activities were included in 48.1% of a person’s last vacation, highlighting a new appreciation for nature and the authenticity it presents (Honey, 2008, p. 11). Ecotourism was born out of this appreciation for natural, pristine areas and the communities that live in and around them. Martha Honey categorizes the four sources responsible for the birth of ecotourism as follows: scientists, conservationists and NGOs,
multilaterals aid institutions, developing countries, and the travel industry and public (2008, p. 13).

Ecotourism typically involves a trip to a legally protected area, such as the U.S. National Parks, that may have originally been set aside as a result of work done by scientists and conservationists. This source of ecotourism has evolved over the years, it is now moving away from the preservationist conservation model previously upheld by NGOs. This model led to the forced removal or isolation of land from local and indigenous communities. As Martha Honey states “protected species, areas, and ecosystems would survive only if those people living nearest them benefited financially from both the parks and tourism” (2008, p. 14). Conservationists and scholars led the school of thought into this “stakeholders” theory “that people will protect what they receive value from” and the term “ecotourism” was coined by an NGO president in 1983 (Honey, 2008, pp. 16–17).

The role of multilateral aid institutions in the beginnings of ecotourism began with their recognition of tourism as a tool for development in the 1970s. The World Bank gave its first tourism related loan to Morocco and Tunisia in 1966, eventually loaning $450 million towards tourism in developing countries between 1969 and 1979 (Honey, 2008, p. 17). These initial loans were towards large projects, such as luxury hotels, and were quickly deemed inefficient for addressing the needs of the local economy. In 1994 the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the funding mechanism of the World Bank, was created with one of its four focal areas being the protection of biodiversity, by inclusionary means, as dictated in the 1992 UN Earth Summit. Major funders including the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Asian Development Bank, African Development Bank, Caribbean Development Bank, Organization of American States (OAS) and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), now provide funding
for sustainable tourism. These large multilaterals “tend to support larger NGOs and companies”, this makes it more difficult for small, grassroots and innovative projects to gain funding (Honey, 2008, p. 23).

Host country governments are the third factor in the development of ecotourism. The realization in the mid-to-late 1980s that ecotourism could serve as a sustainable, and often more profitable, alternative to other income generators (logging, oil extraction, cattle raising, etc.), led to a focus on the industry (Honey, 2008, p. 23). When an elephant herd in Kenya can be valued by economists studying tourism at $610,000 annually, it catches the attention of policy makers, providing powerful incentives for national park protection coupled with the development of ecotourism (Honey, 2008, p. 23). Countries worldwide, such as Namibia, Costa Rica, Kenya, Belize and Jordan, have focused on building their tourism industry around sustainable principles. They often allow the privatization of the industry to maximize efficiency. Martha Honey cautions, however, that unregulated and undertaxed private companies can increase leakage of profits (Honey, 2008, p. 25).

The travel industry is the fourth and final source of ecotourism, in regard to the popularization and mainstreaming of the concept (Honey, 2008, p. 25). The industry responded to customer dissatisfaction with “conventional mass tourism”, as well as growing interest in outdoor experiences, and concern for the environment (Honey, 2008, p. 25). Beginning in the 1980s tourism associations, such as the World Travel & Tourism Council and The Travel Industry Association of America, began recognizing the need for sustainability in the industry. Customer interest in the “green travel trend” continues today, a 2012 TripAdvisor survey revealed that 71% of travelers planned to make eco-friendly choices in the next 12 months (“TripAdvisor Survey,” n.d.). Half of those surveyed “would spend more money to stay at an
eco-friendly accommodation” (“TripAdvisor Survey,” n.d.). Ecotourism is now used as a marketing tool; a tool that does not always indicate that the product being sold is staying true to its claims to be eco-friendly. As Martha Honey states “travel industry adoption of ecotourism has often been more form than substance” (2008, p. 27).

**Greenwashing & Ecotourism Lite**

In every day practice, ecotourism often takes one of three forms: ecotourism lite, greenwashing or authentic ecotourism (Honey, 2002, p. 6–7). Ecotourism lite is described as “small, cosmetic, and often cost-saving steps rather than fundamental reforms that constitute socially and environmentally sensitive practices” (Honey, 2002, p. 6). This trend is best exemplified by the “eco-friendly” practice of large corporations offering to launder towels and linens when requested, rather than daily, or installing energy saving light bulbs. This amounts to little more than cost saving on the part of the corporation and, in some cases, does not hold true to practice. Housekeeping may be changing those towels and linens daily, requested or not. Because this does not amount to a true greening of the industry these practices have been described as “commendable” but not “real ecotourism” (Honey, 2002, p. 6).

The practice of greenwashing is defined as “projects or companies that claim to be involved in ecotourism but are merely using green language in their marketing” (Honey, 2002, p. 6). *Scientific American* describes greenwashing as “what happens when a hopeful public eager to behave responsibly about the environment is presented with “evidence” that makes an industry… seem friendly to the environment” when in fact this may not be the case (Hoffman & Hoffman, 2009). An example of this is the budget airline Easyjet’s two-time reprimanding by the UK Advertising Standard Agency (ASA) for false eco-related advertising. The first ASA reprimand was the result of ads stating that Easyjet’s carbon dioxide emissions were less than a Toyota
Prius’, which proved false, and the second resulted from a claim that Easyjet’s aircraft emitted 22% less CO\(_2\) than traditional airlines, which also proved false (Pearce, 2009; Robbins, 2008).

Toronto Sustainability explored greenwashing using TerraChoice’s “The Sins of Greenwashing”, originally written for consumer household products (Kuehnel, 2011). The “green traveling sins” are described as follows: “the hidden trade-off”, an example being the use of solar panels to heat water without making an effort to conserve water (Kuehnel, 2011). “No proof”, such as marketing a restaurant as serving organic food without stating where it is sourced from; “vagueness”, which describes a claim that is poorly defined or very broad, such as describing an area as being “well-preserved” with no indication of how it is being preserved (Kuehnel, 2011). “Worshiping false labels” described as “words or images” that “gives the impression of a third-party endorsement where no such endorsement exists”. This includes eco-labels that do not provide detail on how certification is achieved or audited (Kuehnel, 2011). “Irrelevance”, such as practices where cruise ships tout gathering recyclables but then deposit them on islands that have no recycling facilities (Kuehnel, 2011). “Lesser of two evils”, a claim that is true but distracts from the greater environmental impact, such as promoting a more fuel efficient airline, which may use less CO\(_2\) but is still using non-renewable energy (Kuehnel, 2011). Lastly, “fibbing”, as in using “environmental claims that are simply false”, Kuehnel notes this is the least committed sin and the one least likely to be done intentionally (2011).

Ecotourism lite and greenwashing are most often propagated by “travel agents, tour operators, airlines and cruise lines, large hotel and resort chains” and “international tourism organizations which promote quick, superficially “green” visits within conventional packages” (“Greenwashing Travel,” n.d.). There are some tenets of ecotourism that are in direct contrast to free trade and globalization, typically supported by the travel industry. Martha Honey notes that
two of the twelve principles of the document *Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry*, the travel industry’s response to the 1992 Earth Summit, directly refer to keeping an open economy and limiting protectionism (2008, p. 34). This is direct contrast to ecotourism’s emphasis on providing economic benefit to the local community, typically by purchasing and hiring locally.

The travel industry is regulated by international trade agreements, which emphasize a global economy through agreements such as GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services). GATS served to open WTO countries to foreign investment and forbids government from favoring national or foreign products and providers (Honey, 2008, p. 35). This makes it increasingly difficult for small, local businesses to compete with foreign providers able to produce and sell their wares at a lower price. There has also been a push toward self-regulation and voluntary certification from international tourism organizations such as the World Travel & Tourism Council, which seeks to circumvent government intervention.

An example of self-regulation within the travel industry is the creation of The American Society of Travel Agents’ (ASTA) “Ten Commandments on Eco-Tourism”. The commandments are directed to the consumer and include statements such as “respect the frailty of the earth” and “educate yourself about the geography, customs, manners and cultures of the region”, but largely ignore means of supporting the local economy (“Greenwashing Travel,” n.d., “Ten Commandments on Eco-Tourism,” n.d.). The commandments are part of “ASTA’s Green Program”, which provides education and self-assessment for travel agents and suppliers through its “Green Guide”, available for purchase on its website (“ASTA’s Green Program,” n.d.). ASTA members can read the guide, complete a self-assessment, sign a “Green Code of Ethics” and complete an application to become an “ASTA Green Member” (“ASTA’s Green Program,” n.d.). Becoming an ASTA Green Member includes a Green Member logo available to use in the
company’s marketing and additional educational materials. Nowhere on the website does it state that there is any audit of the green self-assessment required by applicants, or further review of a company’s sustainable practices before it can become a green member. As Untamed Path notes, practices “such as this have no teeth but allow an organization to claim great sensitivity and responsibility” and can amount to “little more than a marketing ploy” (“Greenwashing Travel,” n.d.).

The final form of ecotourism is authentic ecotourism, which is derived from the concept of sustainable development and includes the following seven characteristics:

- Involves travel to natural destinations
- Minimizes impact
- Builds environmental awareness
- Provides direct financial benefits for conservation
- Provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people
- Respects local culture
- Supports human rights and democratic movements

(Honey, 2008, pp. 30–31)

How the travel industry defines ecotourism varies and without internationally recognized standards it’s very difficult to distinguish authentic ecotourism. As tourism expert Bob Harvey says, “the word ecotourism became a buzz-word in the early 1990s, but so many people used it in so many different ways that it has become virtually meaningless” (as cited by Honey, 2008, p. 70). As the Center for Ecotourism and Sustainable Development describes, “one way of determining which businesses are truly practicing ecotourism is certification” (Bien, 2006, p. 7).

**Certification**

Certification is defined as “a procedure that audits and gives written assurance that a facility, product, process, service, or management system meets specific standards. It awards a logo or seal to those that meet or exceed baseline criteria or standards that are prescribed by the
program” (Honey, 2002, pp. 4–5). The certification process typically involves a first, second, or third party that verifies the business meets the set standards. Third party certifiers, or auditors, are the most objective and therefore are ideal in providing a legitimate and thorough assessment. Accreditation is a necessary aspect of certification. It is “the procedure by which an authoritative body formally recognizes that a certifier is competent to carry out specific tasks” (Honey, 2002, pp. 5–6). Currently, certification is voluntary.

Certification in the tourism industry began as a means of “measuring quality and costs along with health, hygiene, and safety of tourism accommodations, sites, and attractions…or at measuring the quality of tourism professionals” (Honey, 2002, p. 33). Beginning in 1900, Michelin was the first company to begin creating travel guides with a hotel and restaurant rating system, called the Michelin Red Guides (Honey, 2002, p. 34). The company relied on full-time, on-site, anonymous inspectors and customer feedback for its ratings (Honey, 2002, p. 34). The American Automobile Association (AAA), created in 1902 as a federation of affiliated motor clubs, has more than 56 million members in the U.S. and Canada today and was another pioneer in the ratings system (“AAA Fact Sheet,” n.d.). AAA provides travel guides with a rating system for accommodations and restaurants using on-site inspectors and member feedback. Today, both Michelin and AAA focus on conventional tourism and do not have an environmental focus included in their rating systems, reflecting the “traditional” view on factors customers value (Honey, 2002, p. 35).

This traditionalist view began to change in 1992 after the United Nations “Earth Summit” culminated in *Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, and the Statement of principles for the Sustainable Management of Forests*. This declaration called for “environmental and social responsibility for all sectors of society in the world” (Bien, 2006, p.
This drove forward the need for environmental certification beginning with the agricultural industry. The first environmental tourism certifications began in Denmark and Austria in the late 1980s (Bien, 2006, p. 9). Sociocultural aspects of certification were included in 1996 in the Americas, and 2000 in Europe as the theory of the “triple bottom line” became popularized (Bien, 2006, p. 8-9). In 2002, during the International Year of Ecotourism, a study by the UN World Trade Organization found that 60 environmental certification programs existed, mostly European, all voluntary, and few taking into account sociocultural factors (Bien, 2006, p.9).

**Accreditation**

The volume of certifications in existence was counter effective; it lowered certification brand recognition and used a wide array of standards thereby degrading the efforts of the individual programs. As Honey notes, “it is widely recognized that if ecotourism is going to move from good concept to good practices, it must be measured against clear standards” (Honey, 2008, p. 113). Clear and conforming standards are especially important when consumers move from country to country in order to bring legitimacy to established eco-labels (Honey, 2008, p. 115). The need to establish standardization across certification programs, as well as create a global accreditation body, which could essentially certify the certifiers, became evident. As Amos Bien states, “there is an indispensable requirement for all certification systems: credibility. A system without credibility does not have a market; does not convince clients and it does not demonstrate anything” (Bien, 2001, p.2).

In 2000, 45 certification experts met to address these concerns at the UNEP recognized, eco-friendly Mohonk Mountain House in New York (Bien, 2006, p. 9). The resulting “Mohonk Agreement”, laid a foundation for a framework for sustainable and ecotourism certification programs and paved the way for the Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council feasibility study.
This study, conducted with stakeholders from 1,000 organizations and professionals in 26 countries, recommended the establishment of “minimum standards of certification” to be “guaranteed by an accreditation body” (Bien, 2006, p.10). This resulted in the European VISIT standard, the Sustainable Tourism Certification Network of the Americas, and eventually, the founding of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) in 2008, which has met the need for a global accreditation body (Bien, 2006, p. 10).

GSTC, “establishes and manages global sustainable standards with the aim of increasing sustainable tourism knowledge and practices among public and private stakeholders” (“What We Do,” n.d.). The non-profit organization is neutral, independent, mostly consists of volunteer experts in sustainable tourism, and is endorsed and supported by the UNWTO (“What We Do,” n.d.). GSTC has two sets of sustainable tourism criteria: Destination criteria and Hotel & Tour Operator criteria; these act as the minimum requirements that tourism enterprises should aspire to in regard to sustainability (“What We Do,” n.d.). The GSTC Integrity program helps distinguish certification organizations that use third-party verification and meet GSTC requirements by offering three levels of recognition: GSTC Recognized, GSTC Approved or GSTC Accredited (“What We Do,” n.d.).

GSTC Recognized means that the organization’s sustainable tourism standard has met the GSTC criteria, GSTC Approved indicates the GSTC criteria have been met and there has been use of accepted procedures for third-party certification (“FAQ,” n.d.). GSTC Accreditation is described as the “status that is the most reliable and cost effective way to ensure confidence and credibility of sustainable tourism certification, and worldwide acceptance” (“FAQ,” n.d.). It “seeks to recognize standards and certification programs that are credible, transparent, impartial, and comply with the GSTC Criteria for sustainable tourism” (“What We Do,” n.d.). The
accreditation panel operates separately to assure that findings are neutral and objective ("What We Do," n.d.). GSTC criteria are used by organizations cited at the forefront of measuring and establishing standards of practice in the industry such as the UNWTO, European Union, National Geographic Geotourism Program, Ethical Travelers and Sustainable Travel International ("Trends & Statistics 2016," 2016, p. 6). GSTC has also offered accreditation to several well-known ecotourism certifications programs such as EarthCheck and Green Globe ("Trends & Statistics 2016," 2016, p.6). The need for GSTC has become increasingly evident as the popularity of eco-certification continues to grow. There are currently “140 ‘green’ tourism programs around the world” ("Milestones 2003-2015," 2015, p.13).

With the vast amount of certifications in existence the importance of accreditation cannot be understated. Accreditation bodies, such as GSTC, “build credibility and transparency” because they include stakeholders at every level (Sanabria, 2002, p. 326). They include certification programs, local communities and NGOs, the financial community, government and tourism businesses (Sanabria, 2002, p. 327). They also serve to “facilitate international and regional recognition” by helping to promote accredited certifiers as well as allowing “for better organization and harmonization of policies, procedures, and standard setting among accredited certifiers (Sanabria, 2002, p.326). The accreditation process can also “permit economies of scale for promotion and research” (Sanabria, 2002, p. 326). Most importantly, they provide the clear standards and authentication needed to bring legitimacy to certification programs.

The Business Case for Certification

In 2015, the tourism industry saw international tourist arrivals totaling 1,184 million, continuing six years of consecutive growth in the industry, with the UNWTO projecting continued growth through 2016 ("Trends & Statistics 2016," 2016, p.1). As tourism continues to
grow and constitute nearly 10% of world GDP, as well as 1 in 11 jobs worldwide, the competition to capitalize on this market grows along with it (“Trends & Statistics 2016,” 2016, p.1). Conforming to what the consumer wants and gaining a competitive edge has become more important than ever.

Proven adherence to the principles of ecotourism is of interest to consumers. A 2015 Tourism Cares “Good Travels” survey found that half of travelers “think it is very or extremely important for their travel dollars – whether travel spend or donations – to benefit the communities they visit” (Fadnis, 2015, p.7). TripAdvisor named “Choosing destinations based on culture” as the #3 travel trend of 2016 with 47% of travelers surveyed indicating they “visited a destination because of the culture and people of the specific country” (“6 key travel trends for 2016,” n.d.). According to the Center for Responsible Travel (CREST) “research studies continue to show that travelers prefer companies that embed green or eco-friendly practice into their operations. Travelers are coming to expect that tourism businesses will become sustainable in the same way they expect free Wi-Fi connectivity in hotels or online check-in for air travel” (“Trends & Statistics 2016,” 2016, p.3). A 2013 TripAdvisor survey found that 62% of travelers consider the environment when traveling and 69% planned to make more eco-friendly choices in the next year (“Survey,” 2013). TripAdvisor also reports, half of travelers indicated they would spend more money to stay at an eco-friendly accommodation (“TripAdvisor Survey Reveals,” 2012).

However, 32% of travelers “rarely” believe hotel claims to be eco-friendly, 24% indicated they would need to see a hotel’s environmentally friendly certification to believe the businesses’ claims and 41% would need to see and experience green practices first hand (“TripAdvisor Survey Reveals,” 2012). CREST has also found that
“there is a consensus among specialists that we are currently experiencing a “New Tourism.” These new tourists have a higher level of environmental and cultural awareness, which means that, as a result of the generalizations of [information and communication technologies] and social networks, they are more demanding, more able to influence, and have their say on the products they consume” (“Trends & Statistics 2016,” 2016, p.3).

A business that responds to these statistics “can enhance its reputation and recognition in the marketplace as a responsible operator” (“Trends & Statistics 2016,” 2016, p.4). Certification in the tourism industry “helps distinguish genuine ecotourism and sustainable tourism businesses from others that make empty claims” (Bien, 2006, p.10).

The Rainforest Alliance markets their certification program, as a means of meeting consumer demand, standing out from the competition, increasing earning potential and demonstrating corporate citizenship (“Certification Services,” n.d.). They explain that a Rainforest Alliance certification serves as proof that the growing demand for sustainability by consumers is being met. This will increase a business’ market access by differentiating it from the competition. It can lead to increased earnings by showing customers that the business cares about the environment and the social and economic well-being of the local community (“Certification Services,” n.d.). CREST explains that certification benefits businesses’ bottom line by providing an educational opportunity and assisting a business in improving its operations. They explain, “many certified businesses have stated that one of the greatest benefits of the certification process was to teach them the elements of sustainability in their operations and focus their attention on the changes they needed to make in their businesses” (Bien, 2006, p.10). The result is improved business operations, which often leads to increased clientele and a better reputation (Bien, 2006, p.10).

Certification also “tends to reduce operation costs”, specifically by reducing water, electricity and fossil fuel consumption while maintaining quality of service (Bien, 2006, p.11).
Partnering with a certifying body also allows for increased communication on best practices in the industry, additional training and access to other free resources. CREST notes that opportunities for low-cost financing to implement new technology and receive technical assistance also increase after donors and financial institutions observe that a business is certified (Bien, 2006, p.11). Certification can also provide a marketing advantage, especially with well-known organizations such as Rainforest Alliance; their certification seal is recognized by an estimated 20% of Americans (“Certification Services,” n.d.).

Certification is a benefit to consumers by providing an easily recognizable means of identifying environmentally and socially responsible businesses (Bien, 2006, p.11). It “increases public awareness of responsible business practices” and it can provide an educational opportunity on social and environmental issues as well as directives on how tourists can assist in improving these issues (Bien, 2006, p.11). Certification can also be an indicator of quality of service since it demonstrates a business’ dedication to improving itself (Bien, 2006, p.11). Certification benefits the government as well. It can help protect a country’s reputation as a sustainable tourism destination, especially if there have been accusations of greenwashing (Bien, 2006, p.11). It can raise industry standards “in health, safety, environment, and social stability… lowers regulatory costs of environmental protection”, and improve the local economy, specifically by reducing poverty (Bien, 2006, p.11). Finally, as CREST states, certification “protects both the environment and the social and economic structure of local communities near the certified businesses” (Bien, 2006, p.12).

The successes brought by certification have been evidenced by the work of organizations such as the Forest Stewardship Council and the Fairtrade Labeling Organization. The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), created in 1993, promotes “environmentally sound, socially
beneficial and economically prosperous management of the world’s forest” (“Mission and Vision,” n.d.). It has now certified approximately 10% of the world’s working forest (“Certification,” n.d.). The demand for FSC certification continues to increase as retailers such as IKEA, Home Depot, Nike, The Gap and Kinko’s market themselves environmentally friendly for using FSC certified products (Conroy, 2002, p. 113). Similarly, Fairtrade Labeling Organizations International (FLO International), created in 1998, works to improve “market conditions faced by small-scale family coffee farmers”, which is approximately 80 – 85% of all coffee farmers (Conroy, 2002, p. 114). Fair Trade Certified coffee has become hugely popular and is found at chains such as Starbuck’s, Peet’s, Whole Foods, Stop ‘n Shop and ShopRite (Conroy, 2002, p.116). These certifications excelled using a market-based approach that was driven by consumer demand.

Criticism of Certification

Certification costs can be an exclusionary factor for small tourism businesses, which encompass an estimated 85% of the tourism sector (“CREST Milestones 2015,” 2015). Many certifications cost upwards of $1,000 USD and need to be renewed every few years. Ronald Sanabria notes this issue stating it is necessary “to implement a combination of financial mechanisms that includes grants and donations as well as certification fees paid by the applicants” (2002, p. 331). Costs include more than just the certification fees; businesses may have to implement new practices or update infrastructure in order to adhere to set standards. Such costs can require upfront capital and access to credit, making certification “not equitable”, or as Xavier Font states “small firms and developing countries are in a position of disadvantage” (Font, n.d., p. 9).
Font notes that certification often attracts businesses that are already meeting the set standards (n.d., p.10). In order to exact real change certification has to become “large enough” and have an “impact on the market” to “have the power to change behavior of other companies” (Font, n.d., p. 10). Font also states that the credibility and legitimacy of certification is still a work in progress because tourists are not yet “demanding certification” (n.d., p.10). There are several reasons for this, beginning with the fact that certifications are easy to create. Companies such as Orbitz, Expedia and TripAdvisor have all created their own certification programs in recent years. Because they are easy to create there is a proliferation of certification programs in the world and most of them are relatively new. Font describes a need for “image creation and promotion” on the part of certification programs and an emphasis on aggressive marketing to “increase exposure and therefore awareness” (Font & Buckley, 2001, p.262).

The proliferation of certification programs, over 140 programs and counting, can make it difficult for consumers to fully grasp what a certification entails. This is especially true when the certification brand is unfamiliar to the consumer. 64% of travelers surveyed by TripAdvisor indicated “hotels could do a better job of letting potential customers know about their eco-friendliness” (“Survey,” 2013). This includes transparency in its sustainability practices and an explanation on any certifications the business has, how the certification program is accredited and where to find additional information. Font refers to this as bringing “credibility and legitimacy” to certification (Font, n.d., p.11). The accreditation standards set by GSTC have made large strides in addressing this issue. Lastly, a push for integration of certification programs with other “instruments for sustainability” is needed to further streamline these efforts (Font, n.d., p.11).
Chapter Three: Case Studies

Kenya

Kenya has made significant strides to highlight its plentiful biodiversity and wildlife to create an international destination for ecotourism. The country is host to the “Big Five”: African elephants, rhinos, leopards, lions and the Cape buffalo, animals that tourists travel from all over the world to see in their natural habitat (“The Big 5,” 2016). Kenya is also home to scenic beaches and robust coral reef systems. Tourism plays a vital role in the Kenyan economy; in 2015 Kenya welcomed 1,114,000 tourists. The tourism industry had a total contribution of 9.9% total to GDP, and accounted for 9.3% of total employment (“Travel & Tourism, n.d., p.1, UNWTO Tourism Highlights, n.d., p.11). The wildlife of Kenya is its biggest tourism draw. 90% of tourists visit a game park when in the country and 80% “cited nature and wildlife as their major reasons for coming to Kenya” (Honey, 2008, p. 340). The World Bank ranks Kenya as a lower middle-income level country, with a population of 46 million people and a GDP of $63.40 billion in 2015 (“Kenya | Data,” n.d.). The country suffers from a high poverty level at 45.9% of the population (“Kenya | Data,” n.d.). The tourism industry, second only to agriculture in economic value, is therefore a pillar of the economy.

Over the past 20 years the Kenyan tourism private sector in particular, has united to optimize its resources, encourage sustainability and conservation, and ensure a profitable future for tourism in the region. The result has earned Kenya the reputation as an ecotourism mainstay. In 2011, Kenya ranked as the fifth leading international tourist destination in Africa (Akama, et
al. 281). As Martha Honey states, “Kenya has been a trailblazer in ecotourism”; it was at the forefront of “community-based conservation using park and tourism revenues and began the first efforts to systematically adopt ecotourism principles and practices” (2008, p. 339). Examples of these efforts in the private industry have been the creation of the Kenya Tourism Federation, the underlying Ecotourism Kenya, and the resulting Eco-Rating Certification Program, which has identified tourism companies that contribute towards the sustainable future of the industry in regard to both wildlife and rural communities.

Kenya’s wildlife tourism industry has been strengthened by the unity of its private tourism industry organizations under the umbrella of the Kenya Tourism Federation (KTF). The organization recognizes the economic importance and potential of the growing global tourism industry and strives to cultivate opportunities for Kenya’s private tourism businesses. The KTF leadership has provided “coherence and leadership within Kenya’s tourism industry, both in terms of internal organization and to try and influence government policy” (Honey, 2008, p. 339). The Kenya Tourism Federation represents the interests of every area of the tourism industry including: tour operators, hotel keepers, caterers, travel agents, airlines, coastal tourism, pubs, restaurants, entertainment, and the Ecotourism Kenya organization (“Kenya Tourism Federation,” n.d.). Its mission is to “promote a sustainable tourism sector through effective representation of private sector industry stakeholder interests” (“Kenya Tourism Federation,” n.d.). The organization strives to “provide a single voice for the tourism industry”, “enhance ethics and standards”, “strengthen private sector representation”, “provide a forum for the industry to give input” and importantly, to lobby and engage the Kenyan government on issues pertaining to the tourism industry (“Kenya Tourism Federation,” n.d.).
Ecotourism Kenya, the first national ecotourism society in Africa, plays a central role working with the Kenyan tourism industry towards environmental sustainability and social welfare (Honey, 2008, p. 337). The organization is one of a group of NGOs that is credited with reviving the tourism industry in the mid-2000s (Honey, 2008, p. 337). The tagline for the civil society organization, founded in 1996, states “Linking Communities, Tourism & Conservation” ("Ecotourism Kenya," n.d.). Its mission is “to effectively link tourism, communities and conservation for sustainable tourism development in Kenya” ("About Ecotourism Kenya," n.d.). In its initial years the organization struggled to maintain its vision as it was used as a vehicle by a small group of powerful “white-settler-owned companies” to progress their interests over that of local communities (Honey, 2008, p. 337). Initiatives and goals were undertaken that did not have the greater good of Kenya’s rural population in mind. By 1999 membership in Ecotourism Kenya dwindled down to less than ten companies (Honey, 2008, p. 337). The group’s leadership was eventually overturned, and today the organization consists of 550 individuals, community based organizations, and tourism business members, which meet annually to elect a Management Board. Their website presents the current Ecotourism Kenya seven-person board of directors; they are careful to point out that each board member is from Kenya.

Ecotourism Kenya has several sub-committees, which address community outreach, Eco-Rating, PR and Marketing, Fundraising, and Advocacy. The organization has a lengthy list of partners such as the UNWTO and receives donations from organizations such as the Ford Foundation and the United Nations Development Programme. Ecotourism Kenya offers programming in enterprise development, awareness creation and information sharing, research and consultancy, and leadership and mentoring. They issue a magazine entitled Naturals which contains useful information for business owners on the latest environmentally sustainable and
socially responsible practices as well as an annual *Ecotourism Kenya Guide*. Both resources are readily available for download on their website. Ecotourism Kenya is one of seven private-sector organizations that make up the Kenya Tourism Federation and is the home to perhaps its most valued feature, the Eco-Rating Certification Program.

**Eco-Rating Certification Program**

The Eco-Rating Certification Program was created in 2002 and aims to “promote responsible tourism in Kenya” (“Eco-Rating Certification Program,” n.d.). It uses a second party verification system to evaluate criteria and is a GSTC-recognized program. The certification was created with the cooperation of stakeholders in the Kenyan tourism industry. Its prime focus is “recognizing best practices in business practices, conservation, community and cultural performance by tourism accommodation facilities” (“Eco-Rating Certification Program,” n.d.). Reviewed businesses are awarded bronze, silver and gold certifications based on set criteria. The goals of certification are listed as: increasing awareness of “environmentally and socially sound business practices”, “enhancing socio-economic development” of local communities, “increasing contribution of tourism to the local communities”, enhancing conservation of natural resources and improving the image of Kenyan tourism (“Eco-Rating Certification Program,” n.d.).

Hotels, lodges, camps, bush homes and bandas are all eligible to apply for the certification process. Certification is valid for 24 months; the process is managed entirely through Ecotourism Kenya. The Ecotourism Kenya website states several benefits of receiving certification. This includes positive publicity and marketing of the business on the website as well as inclusion in Ecotourism Kenya and partner publications. Those certified find a competitive advantage in marketing their rating; it adds to their credibility and provides proof that the business uses its resources responsibly (“Eco-Rating Certification Program,” n.d.).
Businesses receive useful technical feedback from the evaluation process leading to increased operational efficiency and decreased operating costs. Ecotourism Kenya also notes increased motivation of staff and management, and improved local community relations as benefits (“Eco-Rating Certification Program,” n.d.).

Certification can provide an incentive to face challenges to Kenya’s tourism industry. Protecting Kenya’s wildlife from poaching, climate change and habitat loss is one such challenge. National Geographic reported, “during 2011 alone, roughly one in every twelve African elephants was killed by a poacher” (Scriber, 2014). The Huffington Post states poaching of rhino has also increased. In 2013 59 rhino were killed in Kenya by poachers compared to 30 in 2012, some of these killings took place in heavily guarded areas (2014). As of 2014, only 1,037 rhino were left in Kenya’s private reserves and national parks (Jorgic, 2014). The lion population has declined by 70-90% in the last 40 years due to loss of habitat, poaching and poisoning (“Naboisho Conservancy,” n.d.). As these species are three of the “Big Five” that draw tourists from all over the world, this is an urgent economic, social and environmental matter. Programs that offer inclusion in the economic benefits of wildlife tourism provide an incentive for local protection of these species. This is an indicator that is recognized in the Eco-Rating Certification Program.

In 2014, wildlife officials began supplying food and water to wildlife in national parks during a drought affecting the whole of East Africa (Foster, 2014). This was an unprecedented move in an attempt to save the national park animals (Foster, 2014). The duration and severity of this drought, the worst in 60 years, has been attributed to climate change (Foster, 2014). Climate change can, and has, had a devastating effect on both the wildlife that Kenya depends on as essential to their economy and also to the rural and indigenous populations that are vulnerable to
these changing conditions. Certification provides encouragement for renewable energy use and cutting down on a business’ carbon footprint.

**Campi ya Kanzi**

What have the highest standard gold certified businesses achieved? Campi ya Kanzi is a gold certified luxury ecolodge located near Mt. Kilimanjaro. The ecolodge was founded on a 283,000 acre Maasai reserve in 1996 by two Italian immigrants who have embraced environmental and cultural conservation (“The Maasai,” n.d.). It is noted that “the main goal of Campi ya Kanzi is to protect the land of the Maasai” to allow them to “keep living according to their traditions, if they so wish” (“The Maasai,” n.d.). Every day spent at the ecolodge provides a $101 USD conservation fee towards the Maasai Wilderness Conservation Trust (MWCT), also created by the founders of Campi ya Kanzi (“The Maasai,” n.d.). Guests visit the Maasai community for “cultural talks and dances” and purchase handcrafted items directly from the tribal community (“Campi ya Kanzi,” n.d.).

The ecolodge employs 70 Maasai people who work at Campi ya Kanzi as well as the nearby Kanzi House, which accommodates large groups and families. Campi ya Kanzi can accommodate only 16 visitors at a time, 17,500 acres per guest, in six tented cottages and two tented suites (“The Camp,” n.d.). The ecolodge operates with rain cropping, photovoltaic panels, solar panels and eco-friendly cooking charcoal (“The Camp,” n.d.). The majority of the ecolodge and its furnishings were built from local materials such as downed trees, lava rocks, thatch, and native timber (“The Camp,” n.d.). The ecolodge composts organic waste, utilizes an organic vegetable garden and recycles all materials that qualify (“The Camp,” n.d.). Guests are provided with refillable water bottles to utilize the lodge’s water filtration system as part of the camp’s initiative to reduce plastic use (“The Camp,” n.d.). The bottles are provided for water during a
guest’s stay and are typically kept as souvenirs (“The Camp,” n.d.). The ecolodge uses only biodegradable shower amenities, laundry detergents and cleaning supplies (“Campi ya Kanzi,” n.d.). This five star camp cost a minimum per night of $750 USD.

Conservation fees included in the cost of Campi ya Kanzi support the Maasai Wilderness Conservation Trust. The MWCT’s mission is “to protect the legendary ecosystems and astounding biodiversity of East Africa through conservation that directly benefits local Maasai communities” (“About,” n.d.). The trust employs 250 Kenyans as teachers, doctors and game scouts. It also funds conservation programs, wildlife monitoring, security, land conservancies, payment for ecosystem services, grassland management plans, species research, local leadership development, education and health programs (see Figure 1) and equipment and infrastructure costs. As part of its “Wildlife Pays” program, MWCT reimburses the Maasai people for livestock killed by lions, an issue that previously led to retaliatory lion hunts (“Conservation Programs,” n.d.). The MWCT also provides employment opportunities for Maasai warriors to serve as lion scouts (see Figure 2), providing economic incentive to protect the species. Other sponsors of the MWCT include the Susan G. Komen foundation, Google Earth, Partners in Health and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (“About,” n.d.).

**Basecamp Masai Mara**

Basecamp Masai Mara also received a gold certification. The camp is part of Basecamp Explorer, a Norwegian company founded in 1998. Basecamp Explorer has hotels, lodges and camps in Kenya, France, Norway and India. The company describes itself as “a special blend of unique destinations, operated with a strong focus on sustainability, with a core commitment towards local communities and the environment” (“About Us;,” n.d.). They operate under the
slogan, “Leave a positive footprint” as well as three core principles of “Reduce, Reuse and Recycle” (“About Us;,” n.d.).

Basecamp Masai Mara is described as “our very own ‘cradle of mankind’” and “the mother of all camps” (“Masai Mara,” n.d.). The camp has twelve tents, built along the Talek River next to the Maasai Mara National Reserve. The price per night is $200 for a shared two-person tent. Each tent is built using local and sustainable materials, and is elevated and only partly fenced in allowing wildlife to move freely about the premises. Only natural colors are used blending the structures in with their surroundings. The camp includes a tree plantation called Gruve 3 forest, in which trees are planted to compensate for air travel CO₂ emissions. The Gruve 3 forest joins the existing Basecamp Tree Plantation, which has planted 75,000 trees since it was created in 2000 (“Biodiversity,” n.d.). Seedlings are sent to local schools and health clinics to educate the community on the importance of forests and conservation (“Biodiversity,” n.d.). Guests, such as the Obama family, often plant trees during their stay at Basecamp Masai Mara and/or pay a $25 donation, which covers the cost of planting five trees (see Figure 3) (“Biodiversity,” n.d.).

Basecamp Explorer is one of five tourism companies to support the Naboisho Conservancy, created with the encouragement of Basecamp Explorer, to empower the Maasai people to retain their land. The nature conservancy is owned by the local Maasai community and collects a land lease fee from the five tourism companies every month as part of a 15-year lease agreement (“Naboisho Conservancy,” n.d.). “Naboisho” is a Maasai expression for “coming together” and was chosen by the Maasai community (“Naboisho Conservancy,” n.d.). The conservancy helps to protect and maintain the wildlife in the area. Basecamp Explorer also supports the Mara Predator Project, which focuses on lion conservation (“Naboisho
Conservancy,” n.d.). The company has sponsored community projects within the Maasai reserve including drilling boreholes, upgrading primary school facilities and constructing and equipping a new health clinic (“Naboisho Conservancy,” n.d.). 95% of Basecamp employees are local and they strive to include women as often as possible. The conservancy created the Koiyaki Guiding School in 2006 to train “local youths to become safari guides” in a local economy with very little employment opportunities (“Naboisho Conservancy,” n.d.).

Basecamp Masai Mara has a water and solid waste management system that optimizes the use of water and turns organic waste into manure to be used in the tree plantation (“Basecamp Masai Mara,” n.d.). Light pollution is reduced through the use of lanterns and noise is kept at a minimum by insulating rooms (“Basecamp Masai Mara,” n.d.). The camp relies mainly on energy collected from solar panels; other energy saving practices can be found throughout the premises (“Basecamp Masai Mara,” n.d.). Rainwater is harvested and stored in an underground tank and water conservation techniques, such as water efficient toilets, can be found in the guest tents (“Basecamp Masai Mara,” n.d.). Efforts are made to reduce all packaging materials, only biodegradable chemicals are used at the camp and all food is bought locally if possible (“Basecamp Masai Mara,” n.d.).

The camp’s Basecamp Foundation assists in providing education, health, conservation and community empowerment to the local community (“Basecamp Masai Mara,” n.d.). The foundation supports the Masai Brand Project, which empowers women through the creation of beadwork (“Basecamp Masai Mara,” n.d.). It also provides community-managed micro financing, also geared toward women. Basecamp Foundation provides sponsorship for 15 students to attend day and boarding schools and supports three health clinics. Local community residents are also welcome to collect water from the camp anytime, at no charge. Basecamp
Masai Mara encourages its guests to visit the Maasai village and purchase goods directly from the community. They also provide literature and educational materials to guests on Maasai customs, history and culture (“Basecamp Masai Mara,” n.d.).

**Criticism of the Eco-Rating Certification Program**

The Eco-Rating Certification Program is not without its critics, it has been noted that criteria weigh too heavily on environmental factors and not enough on socio-economic issues such as fair trade, transportation and responsible purchasing (Akama, et al., 2011, p. 288). Akama, et al., recommends a holistic and integrated approach to “help postcolonial states move beyond dependency” by considering the historical and political context of a country in certification criteria (2011, p. 288). This approach includes placing the “basic economic, social and cultural needs of the local people over the economic interests and growth of tourism industry in general” (Akama, 2011, p. 288). This includes concerted efforts to educate locals on the industry and empower them to be part of the decision-making process in an informed and constructive way (2011, p. 288).

In an environmental comparative study between two similar businesses, one having received Eco-Rating certification and the other not, the business with the certification continuously outperformed the other in the following categories: environmental policies, environmental conservation, wastewater management, solid waste management, pollution, water, energy, purchasing & supplies and chemical use (Karanja, 2013, p.40). The general conclusion of the study was that “Eco-rating Certification plays a significant role in enhancing environmental conservation and management of an accommodation facility” (Karanja, 2013, p.52). However, data on the social and economic effects of the Eco-Rating Certification Program
is decidedly lacking, making it difficult to draw an overall assessment of the positive effects of certification.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, certification in Kenya has proven itself to be a tool, perhaps a flawed one, of sustainable development in the country. Given the relative youth of its certification program and the ecotourism industry in general, it’s likely that certification in Kenya, and the set standards it follows, will continue to improve and increase its ability to hold the industry to high standards in regard to its economic, socio-cultural and environmental effects. Kenya remains a desired tourist destination for those seeking wildlife and adventure. As Kenya moves forward to face the challenges of poaching, climate change and habitat loss, as well as addressing its high poverty levels and income disparity between its people, the examples provided by the gold eco-label certified businesses can be replicated to make positive changes throughout this economically vital industry.

**Costa Rica**

Martha Honey refers to Costa Rica as “ecotourism’s poster child” and “a laboratory for ‘green’ tourism” (2008, p. 160). The country of an estimated 5 million people has a “relatively high standard of living”, according to the CIA World Factbook, and a “well-developed social welfare system” including universal access to education, health care, clean water and sanitation (“The World Factbook,” n.d.). 24.8% of the population lives below the poverty line; the majority of jobs are in the tourism and agriculture sectors (“The World Factbook,” n.d.). Tourism is Costa Rica’s largest industry with the agricultural exports of coffee and bananas following behind it. The tourism industry had a total contribution of 12.5% of Costa Rica’s GDP in 2014 with
expected growth through 2025, and a total contribution to employment of 12% ("Economic Impact 2015 Costa Rica," 2015, p. 1). These numbers are significantly higher than the averages of the rest of the Americas, which had a total contribution to GDP of 8.4% and a total contribution to employment of 9.6% ("Economic Impact 2015 Costa Rica," 2015, p. 11). This comparison emphasizes the importance of tourism to Costa Rica’s economy. The growth of this industry has been prudently cultivated since the mid-1980s to capitalize on the country’s abundant natural resources.

This small Central American country accounts for 0.03% of the earth’s surface yet contains nearly 6% of the world’s biodiversity (“Environment,” n.d.). This includes popular sight-seeing animals such as sloths, sea turtles, monkeys, manatees, sharks, whales, crocodiles, 850 species of birds, anteaters and many more (“Wildlife,” n.d.). Tourists come to enjoy the country’s two coastlines, “islands, rain forests, dry, active volcanos, hot springs, caves, river canyons and waterfalls” (“Environment,” n.d.). The country’s tourism industry has benefited from a “well-functioning democracy, political stability, the abolition of its army, respect for human rights, and a (generally) welcoming attitude toward foreigners” (Honey, 2008, p. 161). In 2015, Costa Rica received 2,660 million international tourist arrivals, a 5.3% increase from the year prior, and the most arrivals of any country in Central America ("UNWTO Tourism Highlights, 2016 Edition," 2016, p. 7).

Tourists are drawn to Costa Rica for a myriad of purposes and activities. Its beaches and specifically ecotourism are the top attractions. In a 2014 – 2015 airport exit survey, 71% of tourists indicated they visited the beach and/ or took part in activities such as kayaking, boating and water skiing (“Actividades Realizadas,” n.d.). 66.6% of respondents indicated they took part in an ecotourism activity such as visiting a volcano, observing flora and fauna, bird watching,
scuba diving, snorkeling, exploring a cave, and horseback riding (“Actividades Realizadas,” n.d.). 52.9% participated in some kind of adventure tourism including ATV riding, white water rafting, kite surfing, zip-lining, rappeling, bungee jumping, etc. (“Actividades Realizadas,” n.d.). 34.8% participated in health and wellness activities such as yoga or visiting a hot spring, 22.8% did some kind of sport including golfing, surfing and mountain biking (“Actividades Realizadas,” n.d.). 18.2% participated in a cultural visit to a museum, took a dance or cooking class, enjoyed local food, visited a botanical garden and/or assisted with a religious or missionary activity (“Actividades Realizadas,” n.d.).

The vast majority of these activities are heavily dependant on the good health of the ecosystems in which they take place, such as a coral reef system or the rainforest. The Costa Rican government recognized the need to protect their natural resources and the value they bring in tourism dollars early on. Martha Honey describes Costa Rica’s now flourishing national park system as the “main building block for ecotourism” in the country (n.d.). In 1969 the first national park was created. Today more than 25% of Costa Rica, 160 different areas, are under protection (Honey, 2008, pp. 169–170). The Environment and Energy Ministry (MINAE) oversees the National System of Protected Areas (SINAC), which is “responsible for conservation and sustainable promotion of the country’s biodiversity” (“Biodiversity and Conservation,” n.d.). SINAC is in charge of 11 protected areas and relies on the active participation of the local community in its conservation efforts (“Biodiversity and Conservation,” n.d.). The government buys out land versus forcing out those living within protected areas. This is considered to be the more complicated yet humane approach in acquiring conservation land (Honey, 2008, p. 170). There is an extensive system of private reserves as well, which is older
than the national parks. Most are home to ecotourism businesses which provide, “accommodations, more infrastructure and higher-quality interpretation” (Honey, 2008, p. 184).

The first government tourism organization, the “National Tourism Board”, was created in 1931, eventually becoming the “Costa Rican Tourism Board” in 1955 and today known as the “Costa Rican Tourism Institute” (ICT) (“About Us - ICT,” n.d.). In the mid-1980s, the ICT began to invest in tourism, bringing in visitors from North America and Europe and earning investment dollars from USAID, the World Bank and the IMF (Honey, 2008, pp. 162–163). Through a series of legislative measures providing tax incentives for tourism investment the industry grew to become the number-one foreign exchange earner by 1993. Costa Rica soon became a more popular ecotourism locale than the reigning destinations of the Galapagos Islands, Kenya and Nepal (Honey, 2008, p. 160,163).

Costa Rica had become synonymous with ecotourism; in 1992 it was named the “number one ecotourism destination in the world” by the U.S Adventure Travel Society (Honey, 2008, p.160). Martha Honey notes, “ecotourism and environmental ethics had become a part of Costa Rica’s national consciousness” (2008, pp. 160–161). In 1996, the ICT created the marketing campaign slogan “Costa Rica: No artificial ingredients” (Honey, 2008, p. 160). As Costa Rica’s reputation as an ecotourism destination flourished, traditional models of tourism were drawn to the potential profits in the country. International medium and large hotel chains began to move in developing resorts and vacation home developments, some of which blatantly violated environmental and building code laws and regulations. A 1996 study found that 57% of hotel ownership on Costa Rica’s Pacific beaches belong to foreign owners (Honey, 2008, p. 167). This meant that some of the country’s best and most beautiful beaches were inaccessible to Costa Rican citizens.
Frustration in the country’s sustainable tourism industry rose as new developers created hotels and lodging marketed under the an “eco-friendly” label while exhibiting greenwashing or blatantly destructive practices. The need for a system to differentiate businesses that adhered to sustainable tourism practices from those that were merely “riding the coattails of the ecotourism boom” became evident (Lepree, 2008-2009, p. 62). In 1995 two ICT officials, Marco Picado and Roldolfo Lizano, proposed the creation of the Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST) to the Costa Rican government (Honey, 2008, p. 203). The government quickly approved the initiative and a year later the organization began issuing certifications.

Certification for Sustainable Tourism

As the CST website describes, “the primary purpose of the CST is precisely to turn the concept of sustainability into something real” (“When and why it arises?,” n.d.). CST covers the tourism industry in general, not just ecotourism, as the founders felt the system needed to provide incentive for larger businesses, not just small eco-lodges, to adhere to sustainable practices. According to the ICT website, the program categorizes and certifies tourism businesses based on the degree to which their operation follows a model of sustainability based on the following indicators:

1) Physical-biological: Evaluates sustainability programming and policy implementation concerning the environment.
2) Infrastructure and services: Evaluates management policies and operational systems of the company and its infrastructure (Lepree, 2008-2009, p. 62).
3) External clients: Evaluates management policies concerning a customer’s role in participating in sustainability practices.
4) Socioeconomic environment: Evaluates how the company interacts with the local community including job creation and benefits for locals.

The evaluation is conducted through a 153 question yes/no checklist, each category is tallied and the category with the lowest score determines the sustainability rating (Honey, 2008, p. 204).
CST is based on the 5-star system except the stars are replaced by five green leaves. A business must score a 95 or higher to obtain a level 5 rating, however, certifications at a level 1 are distributed at 20 – 39% of compliance, as seen below (Honey, 2008, p. 204).

This structure is intended to motivate a business to continuously improve upon their rating. Certification is free, voluntary and fully funded by the government. CST is recognized by the GSTC and uses third-party verification; currently 346 businesses are certified (Pluss, et al., 2016, p.32).

In the early years, the demand for certification far exceeded the government’s ability to assess businesses. In mid-2000 171 of 400 hotels in Costa Rica had applied to the program, yet only 37 had become certified (Honey, 2008, p. 205). This changed in 2005 when the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) set an example followed by Costa Rica in creating a committee on tourism standardization (Honey, 2008, p. 205). This committee quickly requested additional funding for CST from the government and extended certifications from hotels to include tour operators. These tour operators began to partner only with certified hotels resulting in a surge in certifications (Honey, 2008, p. 205). This increase served to protect Costa
Rica’s image as an ecotourism hotspot against growing competition from other Central American countries (Honey, 2008, p. 206).

**Lapa Rios**

In 2003, Lapa Rios, a five star luxury ecolodge, was the first hotel awarded five green leaves by CST. It scored 100% in three of the four categories assessed ("Albergue Lapa Rios," n.d.). The resort has served as a pioneer in ecotourism from its inception in 1993. It aligns its business practices with a 21 point environmental strategy covering environmental conservation, support of the local community, and preservation of local culture and society. The ecolodge is located in Osa Peninsula in the southwestern corner of the Pacific coastline of Costa Rica, on a 1,000 acre private reserve ("Albergue Lapa Rios," n.d.). It consists of 17 bungalows, an open-air gourmet restaurant, a deck and a canopy rooftop. Lapa Rios was founded by Karen and John Lewis of Minnesota and is now run by Cayuga Sustainable Hospitality, a Costa Rican-based management company dedicated to sustainable tourism and customer satisfaction (Honey, 2008, p. 177). The ecolodge has received numerous accolades including recognition as a National Geographic Unique Lodge, eco-awards from Conde Nast Traveler, TripAdvisor and Rainforest Alliance. It was a recipient of the 2005 “Award for Corporate Excellence”, the only ecolodge to receive the honor, awarded by then Secretary of the State Condoleezza Rice (Honey, 2008, p.175).

The Lapa Rios vision is “to demonstrate that a standing rainforest is more valuable than one cut down” ("Sustainability at Lapa Rios," n.d.). In fact, the ecolodge was built without cutting down a single tree, it instead used existing pasture land, already cleared for use. The ecolodge has an extensive mission which includes the following: protection of the private reserve in which it is situated, “integrating and assisting the local community through basic education
and job training”, “educating guests about conservation and preservation of the rainforest and local culture” and providing education for local children (“Sustainability at Lapa Rios,” n.d.). The mission also includes the less traditional values of “doing what you say you are going to do”, “doing the ‘right thing’”, “finishing what you start”, motivating and encouraging others, being indifferent to criticism and societal pressure, and “doing something that makes a lasting difference” (“Sustainability at Lapa Rios,” n.d.). The Lapa Rios website lists the challenges faced in the Osa Peninsula including deforestation, poaching, pollution and irresponsible real estate development (“Sustainability at Lapa Rios,” n.d.). The ecolodge actively works toward reversing the “apathy, corruption, lack of education and awareness” that contribute to these issues by focusing on “education, awareness and consciousness-raising” (“Sustainability at Lapa Rios,” n.d.).

The ecolodge supports environmental conservation through its 1,000 acre private reserve, which also acts as a wildlife corridor and protective barrier for the nearby 100,000-acre Corcovado National Park (“Sustainability at Lapa Rios,” n.d.). Lapa Rios has signed an agreement to ensure that this land is preserved in perpetuity (“Sustainability at Lapa Rios,” n.d.). Tours in the nature reserve may only be conducted by a trained guide, with a maximum of 8 people per hike, per day; there is a strict rule against touching or feeding wildlife (“Sustainability at Lapa Rios,” n.d.). Guests have the option of participating in a reforestation program by planting a Sangrillo tree, one of 37 species of trees local to the area that is in danger of extinction (“Lapa Rios conservation,” n.d.). Lapa Rios supports The Wildcat Conservation Program through funding research equipment and academic conferences, and allowing studies of animals in the reserve (“Lapa Rios conservation,” n.d.). The ecolodge also does not allow motorized
recreational activities in the reserve or on the beach and aims to limit noise pollution on its premises (“Sustainability at Lapa Rios,” n.d.).

Lapa Rios was built, using local, largely renewable materials (70%), by a master craftsman from the Osa Peninsula who utilized building techniques and styles native to the area (Honey, 2008, p. 176). The buildings and pathways incorporate erosion control, there is on-site waste disposal and management, solar heated water and the ecolodge “initiated the area’s first glass and plastic recycling system” (“Sustainability at Lapa Rios,” n.d.). Guests are provided and requested to use only biodegradable products, all cleaning on the premises is also done using biodegradable cleaning solutions (“Sustainability at Lapa Rios,” n.d.). The bungalows were designed to harness the natural breeze moving through the reserve and therefore do not contain air conditioning units; the pool is salt-based to use less chlorine (“Sustainability at Lapa Rios,” n.d.). The ecolodge contains a “Guide Hut” with a library of books on the biodiversity in the area and guides are present to answer questions (“Sustainability at Lapa Rios,” n.d.). Guided hikes include education on the area and conservation (“Sustainability at Lapa Rios,” n.d.). The gourmet restaurant uses local produce and homegrown food from their organic garden. Leftovers are fed to the ecolodge’s pigs and the biogas produced by the pigs fuels the kitchen (“Sustainability at Lapa Rios,” n.d.). The ecolodge planted 25,000 native “suita” palms for future repairs on its thatch roofs (“Sustainability at Lapa Rios,” n.d.).

Lapa Rios has worked to improve and provide economic opportunity for the local community. The ecolodge hires only local staff, currently employing an estimated 50 people, including those in top management positions (“Sustainability at Lapa Rios,” n.d.). Job training and education, including English lessons, are provided and job promotions are a regular occurrence, Martha Honey notes “many of the staff members have worked at the lodge for more
than ten years” (see Figure 5) (Honey, 2008, p. 177). Lapa Rios indicates that “salaries are far higher than the national average” and they employ staff year-round, even during low season (“Staff & Local Community,” n.d.). Employees are provided on-site subsidized housing and food, as well as financial assistance for real estate purchases and loan acquisitions (“Staff & Local Community,” n.d.). The ecolodge uses local transportation companies and allows “local dance groups and artisans to perform and sell their crafts at the lodge” (see Figure 6) (“Staff & Local Community,” n.d.). They also work to educate visitors on the benefits of buying locally and supporting local artisans (“Responsible Travel,” n.d).

Supporting and respecting the local community and culture is also a cornerstone of Lapa Rios’ practices. Their website offers educational information on Costa Rican traditions, instruments and crafts. Lapa Rios lists one of its strengths as informing and educating guests on cultural issues of the area and acceptable cultural behavior (“Sustainability at Lapa Rios,” n.d.). The lodge’s largest contribution to the community is The Carbonera School, a primary education school for local children. These children previously had no formal school to attend in this rural area (“Carbonera School,” n.d.). Through the establishment of The Carbonera School Foundation, Lapa Rios funds the school, provides scholarships to students, and supports other local schools in the area, including the provision of environmental conservation education (“Education key to sustainability,” n.d.). The foundation is also supported by guest donations. Guests are encouraged to partake in a tour of the school to “share and learn with the local community” (“Tours & Experiences,” n.d.). A 2010 Stanford University study of the social and environmental effects on the Osa Peninsula tied to Lapa Rios found that the lodge had “made impressive contributions” to both local livelihoods and environmental conservation (Almeyda Zambrano et al., 2009, p. 81). The study states Lapa Rios “has shown itself to be an active
participant in improving livelihoods, environmental awareness, and conservation throughout large parts of the peninsula” (Almeyda Zambrano et al., 2009, p. 81).

Criticism of Certification for Sustainable Tourism

LePree offers his analysis and criticisms of CST based on its four categories of indicators. In regard to the “Physical-Biological” category, LePree suggests that there is a disconnect between environmental information and education provided by a business (a scoring criterion), and a tourist’s absorption of the information and their behavior and practices (2008-2009, p. 67). For example, at Lapa Rios, there may be a rule and an explanation as to why guests cannot feed wildlife. Guests may receive that information in a myriad of different ways, which is what the CST personnel will account for, but there is no measurement as to whether or not a guest has followed that rule. A tourist may be provided information, it does not necessarily mean they will absorb it and alter their behavior accordingly.

In regard to “Infrastructure and Services”, LePree notes that while CST evaluators assess a business’ enablement of the local community, it does not address the community’s often lack of political control and ability to self-govern (2008-2009, p. 68). The example he uses is that of Monteverde, a popular ecotourism location, which is part of the Puntarenas municipality (2008-2009, p. 68). Residents of Monteverde have long fought to make the area its own municipality so they could better “shape the direction of tourism development” (LePree, 2008-2009, p. 68). Their inability to self-govern Monteverde has been to their detriment and has led to unchecked irresponsible business practices and development in tourism. CST measures how a business encourages local community empowerment but does not address the issue of lack of a governing structure in which to exert that empowerment.
In regard to “External Clients”, LePree criticizes the 10% of questions in the CST that measure a business’ work in educating the client on sustainability and “ways in which the business complies with the concept” (2008-2009, p. 69). LePree notes the WTO’s definition of sustainable tourism, which encourages raising awareness of sustainability and promoting sustainable tourism practices, suggesting there is a resulting commoditization of ecosystems and cultures in this effort (2008-2009, p. 69). He draws on the work of Jamal, Borges and Stronza who argued voluntary certification programs such as the CST are “driven by global, profit-driven, neo-liberal policies, (and) advocate self-regulation and objective measures that do poor justice to intangible cultural aspects and relationships with Nature” (Jamal et al., 2008, p. 168). This is to say, the result of raising awareness and educating the consumer becomes an idealized version of what a rainforest experience should be. In the case of Lapa Rios this might include a guided hike to a hidden waterfall with a picnic basket and a bottle of wine in contrast to solely appreciating and enjoying being in nature. LePree suggest these practices send the wrong message and miss the “spiritual and interpretive educational experience that should strive to be the focus of sustainable tourism product” (2008-2008, p. 70).

LePree makes a similar argument of commoditization of culture in discussing the final CST category of “Social and Cultural Impacts”. He argues that CST encourages “the presentation and commoditization of culture” through its scoring criteria. For example, a hotel that “publicizes and promotes cultural activities and expressions” is at fault for encouraging the use of culture as a marketable product (2008-2009, p. 71). LePree notes these practices can devolve cultural expressions, encourage cultural homogenization and undermine culture as a foundation of the tourism industry (2008-2009, p. 71). The better option is to encourage the preservation of local culture and put the decision making in the hands of the local stakeholders.
and indigenous populations (LePree, 2008-2009, p. 71). LePree also notes that gender issues are largely underrepresented in the CST’s questionnaire with just one criterion asking if an establishment prohibits sexual harassment and promotes equal opportunities for both genders (LePree, 2008-2009, p. 72). Gender inequality is a prevalent issue in Costa Rica and LePree suggests the CST should do more to encourage gender equity and female empowerment (2008-2009, p. 71).

**Conclusion**

Costa Rica has done an excellent job of marketing itself as an ecotourism destination. The ICT has led the task of maintaining Costa Rica’s competitive edge in the tourism industry and its position in the international tourism market. In April 2013, 49% of travel agents named Costa Rica as the most popular destination among clients (“Travel Guard Update,” n.d.). Having a strong, establishment backing the country’s tourism industry has become increasingly important as Central American neighbors Nicaragua and Honduras have entered the ecotourism market in recent years. With the establishment of the Certificate for Sustainable Tourism, Costa Rica (and the ICT) further solidified its reputation as a pioneer in sustainable tourism. It should now use this leverage to continue to build and expand this program. The CST has been proven to successfully address macro and micro level issues in tourism such as leakage. On average, an estimated 50% of revenue still leaves a destination country (Lansing & Devries, 2007, p. 282). CST encourages employing locals and nationals at all levels of management, providing employee training and education programs and working with local and national enterprises on all aspects of business from buying furniture to purchasing and installing technology (LePree, 2008, p. 73).
Costa Rica can continue to improve upon CST by increasing enrollment in the program and elevating its marketing towards potential customers and tour agents, especially online travel sites. Recently, TripAdvisor released an article on Costa Rica and ecotourism with a mention of the CST program, but it did not include a thorough explanation of what the program is and why it is important (“Costa Rica,” n.d.). Increasing the public’s awareness of this program and its goals would help to move it forward and increase interest and participation by Costa Rica’s tourism industry. As a hotelier describes “The CST is an extraordinarily important concept. Today tourists talk about five stars like it’s an adjective. We need them to do the same with CST’s five ‘green’ leaves” (Honey, 2008, p. 206). The ICT can also work to provide incentives for businesses that participate in the program.
Chapter Four: Analysis & Recommendations

Analysis

Martha Honey describes ecotourism as having the potential to be a “tool for economic development and environmental protection” (Honey, 2008, p. 28). The fulfillment of this potential is based on the establishment of clear standards of practice and a means of measuring adherence to them. What I have found by reviewing Kenya’s Eco-Rating Certification Program and Costa Rica’s Certification for Sustainable Tourism is that certification can serve as a vehicle for setting clear standards of practice and also provide a reward, and therefore an incentive, for meeting them. Both the Eco-Rating Certification and CST base their criteria on the Global Sustainable Tourism Council’s sustainable standards. They represent programs that are working toward the common goal of aligning themselves with internationally recognized quality standards of practice. Therefore, they are comparable examples of certification programs that follow GSTC’s standards of practice.

In Martha Honey’s book Ecotourism and Sustainable Development: Who Owns Paradise?, a case study of a country’s ecotourism policies and practices is concluded by providing the country an “Ecotourism Scorecard” based on the seven characteristics of ecotourism defined in the text. This analysis will provide an ecotourism scorecard, based on Honey’s seven characteristics, to examine the effectiveness of GSTC certification programs as represented by the Eco-Rating Certification and CST, and their use as supportive tools for ecotourism and therefore sustainable development.
**Ecotourism Scorecard:**

1) *Involves Travel to Natural Destinations*

Both the Eco-Rating Certification and CST have been designed to assess businesses involved in travel to natural destinations. While they do not specifically require a business to be in a natural setting, they both have criteria that measure the business’ impact on the environment, including its conservation practices and protection of biodiversity. An example of this is the Eco-Rating Certification indicator measuring “Demonstrative and effective action in mitigating negative effects of the facility and protecting the natural environment around it” (Ecotourism Standard, 2016, p. 10). CST has criteria requiring a business to protect or support a program that preserves a natural area. This indicator also suggests the destination is in a remote and protected area. In the cases of Campi ya Kanzi, Basecamp Kenya and Lapa Rios, all meet this description, they are remote and the land they are located on is under formal protection. In this category the certifications are doing well, they were designed to address sustainable tourism, not specifically ecotourism, which may be a reason why natural setting is not a requirement, but they do suggest it in their criteria.

2) *Minimizes Impact*

This indicator emphasizes prevention and minimization of environmental damages to an area attributed to a tourism business. Kenya’s Eco-Rating Certification thoroughly addresses this in its “Environmental Conservation” criteria through indicators such as, “Interactions with wildlife take into account cumulative impacts, do not cause negative impacts on the viability and behavior of wildlife population” (Ecotourism Standard, 2016, p. 11). CST addresses this through several criteria including, prevention of impact, protection of the natural environment, and an environmental management section (Cuestionario de Evaluacion, n.d.). It should be noted that
Campi ya Kanzi, Basecamp Kenya and Lapa Rios all have thorough waste and environmental management and wildlife conservation programming. This appears to be the certification programs’ strongest category. As most conservation programs initially focused on environmentalism over preserving and improving the local culture and economy, this is to be expected.

3) *Builds Environmental Awareness*

This category includes education for tourists, staff and local residents. Indicators consider reduced park entry fees and educational programming for locals, provision of trained guides to lead tourists, and providing information to tourists before and during their visit. Eco-Rating Certification addresses this through the “Visitor Education” and “Staff education and awareness training” criteria. However, environmental education for the local community is not included, though supporting education in general is. It should be noted that Campi ya Kanzi and Basecamp Kenya both provide environmental education for the local community. CST addresses the use of trained guides, educating clients and staff but also does not directly require environmental education of the local community. Lapa Rios does have programming specifically targeted towards educating the locals, specifically children. In this category both Eco-Rating Certification & CST can improve their efforts to educate the local population by including specific criteria in their rating systems.

4) *Provides Direct Financial Benefits for Conservation*

This category refers to raising “funds for environmental protection, research and education” (Honey, 2008, p. 30). Neither certification specifically requires the raising of funds but both do refer to supporting environmental conservation as well as partnering with environmental organizations or research agencies. This language implies that the business is providing some
sort of financial support. The three businesses examined, Campi ya Kanzi, Basecamp Kenya and Lapa Rios all have extensive conservation efforts supporting programming they either have founded, such as the Naboisho Conservancy in Kenya, or have partnered with, such as The Wildlife Conservation Program in Costa Rica. In this category the certification programs rate highly. Their criteria do emphasize working with conservation programs, which typically requires financial support.

5) Provides Financial Benefits and Empowerment for Local People

Martha Honey notes that this category is the most likely to “fall through the cracks” or be followed “partially or formally” (Honey, 2008, p. 31). The Eco-Rating Certification addresses this through its “Community” section, through a set of seven criteria that include employment policy, community empowerment and facilitating the promotion and support of sales and services from the local community (Ecotourism Standard, 2016, p. 15-18). Their criteria include indicators that are clear and specific. They consist of directives such as “each facility should clearly document the kind of support that they provide to the communities they deal with” and note the need for gender parity in programming (Ecotourism Standard, 2016, p. 17). CST includes a socioeconomic section of criteria with subsections such as direct and indirect economic benefits to the local community and involving the community in tours and activities facilitated through the business. The Eco-Rating Certification is more thorough and complex, it’s therefore regarded as the better model in comparison to the CST’s criteria which are fairly limited. There is room for improvement in this category, financial benefits are encouraged but the notion of empowering the local people is lacking.

6) Respects Local Culture
Respect for local culture includes being aware and considerate of local customs, being non-intrusive and minimizing the negative effects of tourism that can be brought to a community such as prostitution and drugs (Honey, 2008, p. 31). Eco-Rating Certification addresses this through visitor education, including the provision information on the local culture and avoidance of buying illegal or forbidden souvenirs. The certification also indicates a business’ architectural design should “respect the natural and cultural heritage of the surroundings” and encourages the preservation and protection of cultural sites, including allowance of locals to use sites if on the business’ property (Ecotourism Standard, 2016, p. 15). Eco-Rating Certification also measures collaboration with the local community to develop a “Code of Conduct” for visitors to reference when interacting with locals (Ecotourism Standard, 2016, p. 19).

CST includes criteria requiring appropriate interpretation of culture and archaeological sites, and inclusion of sociocultural elements in tours. The certification encourages the monitoring of tourism’s effect on local sociocultural elements and corrective action to minimize negative impact, and to support local cultural activities. Again, Eco-Rating Certification addresses this category more thoroughly than CST but they both do address it. In the business case studies from each country all three businesses make an effort to educate their visitors on the local culture and respect and support the local community. The certification programs did well in this category, though CST should address this with additional criteria to increase its effectiveness and provide best practices.

7) Supports Human Rights and Democratic Movements

In regard to supporting human rights, Eco-Rating Certification’s first criteria is “Legal requirements”, which is described as “Compliance with all applicable local and international regulations” (Ecotourism Standard, 2016, p. 15). Kenya is a signatory of the African Charter on
Human and Peoples' Rights, an international human rights treaty “intended to promote and protect human rights and basic freedoms in the African continent” (African Charter, n.d.). All businesses certified should align its practices with the articles of this treaty, which came into effect in 2005 (African Charter, n.d.). Eco-Rating Certification includes criteria requiring evidence of a sustainable wage, and that disadvantaged local groups have equal opportunities for employment, including affirmative action and capacity building programs (Ecotourism Standard, 2016, p. 21). There is also a criterion dictating “there should be clear evidence of no child labour or child abuse practice and respect of basic human rights” (Ecotourism Standard, 2016, p. 22).

CST’s criteria require providing employees information on laws regarding sexual harassment, child prostitution and consuming illegal substances. Criteria also mention holding training sessions on the local culture, respecting each other’s differences and working with disabled visitors. As mentioned previously, CST includes criteria encouraging monitoring and correcting any negative impact of tourism activities on the sociocultural aspects of the local community. Some of the first criteria discuss having policies that support sustainability which would encompass human rights and empowerment initiatives. Both certifications could better address the support of democratic movements; this is not directly addressed in either program.

Human rights are thoroughly supported by Eco-Rating Certification. CST, as in most categories, covers this issue with a broader set of indicators.

Critical Review

Both the Eco-Rating Certification and CST are largely in alignment with the seven characteristics of ecotourism. These programs have the potential to be useful tools in propagating the values of sustainable development. But have they been proven to affect positive change in Kenya and Costa Rica in practice? The simple answer to this is no, for the following reasons:
1) Lack of comprehensive data on effects of certification programs

The data that exists on this subject is primarily from independent studies conducted to measure the effect of certification on one or more of the sustainable development categories. Surprisingly, GSTC, Eco-Rating Certification and CST do not have accessible studies on the effects of their certification programs. When contacted, GSTC replied, “one of the projects GSTC has underway” is to “collect and analyze such information now that destinations have had a few years under their belts of implementation following assessments” (K. Pessolano, personal communication, November 1, 2016). The project is still ongoing and no further information was available at that time. The lack of data from these certification programs is fairly standard in regard to ecolabels, Vermeer et al., reveals that only 44% of labels “have conducted an impact study to assess the effect of their certification efforts on the environment” (Vermeer, et al., 2010, p. 6). Only 25% are aware of the market share of their label and one-third of labels “had made no attempt to monitor or evaluate the environmental and social benefits of their ecolabels” and had no intention of doing so (Vermeer, et al., 2010, p. 6). A part of this issue certainly stems from the general youth of these programs and the limited resources they are working with.

2) Minimal participation in certification programs

Participation in the certification process, in both countries, can be improved; this is especially true of Kenya. In Costa Rica, as of 2016, 346 businesses have undergone certification (Pluss, et al., 2016, p.32). A search on TripAdvisor of “Traveler Ranked” hotels in Costa Rica resulted in 753 accommodations, which means about 45.9% of these accommodations have been certified. In Kenya, as of 2002, only 109 businesses had undergone certification. According to Karanja, there are over 1,000 facilities in Kenya eligible for certification (2013, p. 32). While there has been growth in the Eco-Rating Certification over the last 13 years, attributed largely to a growing
interest in marketing sustainability, 109 businesses is still very low and makes it difficult to properly assess the implications of the certification program on sustainable development in Kenya as a whole. The study by Karanja revealed a need to better market the certification program, and the benefits of applying, to business owners as well as address the inaccessibility of certification for small businesses unable to afford the certification fees (2013, p. 35).

3) **Lack of consumer awareness of certification programs & demand**

As noted by Amy Hansen,

“Ecotourism certification will only succeed if tourists want and support environmentally and socially responsible enterprises, but eco-certification within the tourism industry has not yet reached a majority of consumers. The actual extent of consumer demand for sustainable tourism (especially if it costs more) remains an area of considerable uncertainty and debate among experts.” (2007, p.25).

Marketing efforts to increase consumer awareness by Eco-Rating Certification & CST fall largely on their websites, if travel is booked through a travel agency or an online vendor that sells travel packages the consumer may never come in contact with this information. There is little in the way of definitive proof that consumers are drawn to certain accommodations in Kenya and Costa Rica because they have been certified. The success of the Fair Trade and Forest Stewardship Council certifications was preceded by a strong marketing campaign and awareness raising among consumers. Until that happens in ecotourism it is likely certification programs will remain fairly unknown. The difficulty is increased by the lack of an over-arching, brand name, international certification label that consumers know and trust.

**Recommendations**

1) **Conduct comprehensive impact study on effects of certification**

In order to maximize efforts in the future it is necessary to know the impact and significance of the actions that have already taken place. As these certifications grow and the need for more
resources to support them increases, substantive data on the impact of these programs will be essential in justifying the cost of moving them forward. It is important to know if their mission statements and goals are being met in order to make strategic adjustments to programming, or, if necessary, focus resources elsewhere.

To achieve this, a comprehensive impact study should be conducted by Ecotourism Kenya and the Costa Rican Tourism Institute on their respective certification programs. GSTC should aid this effort by informing on best practices and assisting accredited programs in conducting such studies. GSTC can also serve as the over-arching body to collect, aggregate, analyze and release reporting on the state of tourism certification on a regular basis. As this is a costly and resource heavy undertaking, it would be best assisted by closely related efforts to move towards sustainable tourism such as the United Nations Environment Programme 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns (10YFP). The 10YFP is “a global framework of action to enhance international cooperation to accelerate the shift towards sustainable consumption and production (SCP) in both developed and developing countries” (“What is the 10YFP?”, n.d.). The 10YFP has designated sustainable tourism as one of its six programmes and could serve as a partner in exploring the benefits of certification in tourism to promote its mission.

2) Increase marketing and awareness efforts to tourism businesses

An increase in marketing certification and its benefits to the national tourism industry is especially relevant to Ecotourism Kenya as it has a lower level of participation than the Costa Rican Tourism Institute. In order for the certification programs to gain real traction, participation by a substantial number of businesses is required. The more companies that participate and market their certification to consumers the more in demand the certification will become. The
application process should be streamlined to allow for smaller businesses to participate without becoming overwhelmed by the requirements. The certification fee for Ecotourism Kenya could be charged according to a sliding scale as cost has been named as a deterrent to applying for certification according to Karanja (2013, p.35). Given the significance of tourism to both Kenya and Costa Rica’s economy it may serve the countries well to provide a subsidy or tax incentive for participation in these programs as a means to promote sustainable tourism and protect this lucrative industry.

3) **Partner with private industry to increase consumer awareness of certification**

According to one source, nearly 60% of all travel reservations are made on the internet, including 39% of hotel reservations (“Internet Travel,” 2016). The most popular travel sites in 2016 included TripAdvisor (#2) and Expedia (#4) (“Top 15 Most Popular,” 2016). These companies have made strides in recent years to push towards sustainable travel. TripAdvisor created its own certification program entitled “GreenLeaders”; the program places a green leaf next to a hotel that has applied and been accepted into the program when a customer searches for accommodations (“GreenLeaders”, n.d.). Expedia has a “green” travel site that allows customers to search for “Green hotels” and provides tips on responsible travel and reducing your carbon footprint (“The Green Travel Guide,” n.d.).

A partnership with these sites to assist in promoting national certifications programs is in the best interest of both parties. It provide an excellent opportunity to further educate the consumer on the importance of green travel and it is good publicity for the travel websites as they establish themselves as responsible global citizens and as being on the forefront of pushing for the establishment of sustainable tourism. These certification programs can also be promoted
to large travel agencies such as American Express Travel, Carlson Wagonlit Travel and AAA as an opportunity to gain great publicity for their companies while promoting a good cause.

Conclusion

Tourism certification has proven itself effective at upholding the values of “real” ecotourism and therefore sustainable development in structure, as shown through the examination of Kenya’s Eco-Rating Certification and Costa Rica’s Certification for Sustainable Tourism standards, but this has yet to be proven in practice. Certification in the industry remains in its early stages as evidenced by the three reasons identified in the critical review: lack of comprehensive data, minimal participation and lack of consumer awareness. These are three issues commonly found in new programming. I would expect, as an emphasis on moving towards sustainable practices in the tourism industry grows, that these issues will be improved upon.

There is existing evidence of tourism certification progression in the founding and continuous growth of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council in accrediting certification programs. As participation in the GSTC increases, programs will have collective resources to dedicate to impact studies and the establishment and continuous review of best practices to make their processes increasingly efficient and effective. GSTC has the potential to act as an umbrella organization to bring together all parties to decide on a means of marketing tourism certification under a common branding scheme. With pooled resources and a common goal, programs such as the Eco-Rating Certification and Certification for Sustainable Tourism can move past their limitations, due mostly to resource restrictions, to capitalize on the collaboration and collective action of the many certification programs in existence.
In the quest to make tourism sustainable, certification may not be a panacea for all the industry’s ills but it can be a tool for positive change, specifically in regard to ecotourism. Through standards that continue to align with the principles of sustainable development certification can be expected to continue to expand, evolve, and help shape the future of the growing tourism industry. As this evolution continues scholarly review and analysis of this topic will provide an important perspective on the effectiveness of such programming. Presently, the potential for tourism certification to find its place in cultivating and emphasizing the positive aspects of the industry while negating the negative aspects is present. If attempts to standardize this tool across the industry are successful, impact studies are analyzed for improvements, and marketing efforts are streamlined, I believe that potential can be fulfilled.
Appendix

Figure 1: MWCT sponsored pharmacy

Figure 2: Maasai lion scouts
Figure 3: Planting trees at Basecamp Masai Mara

(“What is Gruve 3 Forest?,” n.d.)

Figure 4: Koiyaki Guiding School students

(“Basecamp Explorer,” n.d.)
Figure 5: Lapa Rios staff awards

Figure 6: Handmade crafts
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