Mini Literature Review:

ECOTOURISM

TMGT 3050 - 01

Submitted to Mary Hanlon

Brittany Alyse Brennan - T00615954

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Ecotourism connects to nature and the cultural environment; in general, it is a form of tourism-related sustainable development (SD), and as the definition of ecotourism is debatable through the industry, that creates space for misrepresentation (Cater & Cater, 2015). There continues to be a debate about the benefits and losses of ecotourism, specifically between the 'host' communities and 'guests' that travel to them, especially when the expected deliverables are not always held up (Cater et al., 2015). This review will not explore the gender aspect of the local communities or travellers. The research covers 2008 - 2017 and the majority of the sources conclude that despite the intent to be good-natured, ecotourism unintentionally damages the area it is trying to protect. Still, there is hope for more sustainable methods moving forward by taking into account a stronger framework involving local perspectives.

Starting with Cater & Cater's paper on ecotourism, what defines it and how to break it down into distinguishing five core principles; three of the five states "that it is nature-based, ecologically sustainable, and environmentally educative…[however, the last two] that it should be locally beneficial and generate tourist satisfaction" (p 105) apply to all forms of tourism (2015). Cater suggests that ecotourism is a westernized construct that creates misappropriation by turning nature and local cultures into commodities and by not including indigenous cultures in the creation of ecotourism, they are setting up ecotourism to fail (Cater et al. 2015). In general, Cater suggests questioning the theory and practice of ecotourism and that by using a mostly western concept as a framework, you are assuming that 'one-size-fits-all' mentality will work when that is not the case (2015).

Ecotourism can help promote conservation and economic growth, but that leads to many changes in the local communities regardless of the intent to be directly beneficial to the community; it tends to create both positive and negative results (Stronza & Gordillo, 2008). Stronza and Gordillo reviewed case studies in three Amazonian cities, suggesting if a community receives benefits from a nature-based endeavour, then the people are likely to invest in protecting that nature through stewardship (2008). Stronza and Gordillo worked with local leaders to construct a holistic and participatory framework to understand the effect ecotourism has on individual communities; they also utilized a comparative study to look at partnerships (2008).

The study methods were both ethnographic and comparative but also participatory; they discovered that many issues with ecotourism development are fixable, but the challenges they face remain political (Stronza et al. 2008). Indigenous participants agree there is a series of costs as well as benefits to 'host' communities surrounding ecotourism, and that is why Stronza speaks to the empowerment of local communities, and they need to be the centre of all decisions (2008).

"Ecotourism is a method to satisfy the concern of new tourists for environmental conservation but it neglects one of the key factors of sustainable tourism today: the host communities." (Fiorello & Bo, 2012 p 758) As earlier addressed by Stronza et al. 2008 the host communities are vital, but furthermore, Fiorello and Bo also state the importance that the type of tourist is changing to a ‘new tourist’ who is more interested with the impact they are leaving on the local communities and nature than the previous mass tourism (2012). The article addresses a more advanced form of ecotourism centred on the host community, what they call community-based ecotourism (CBET), with critical features being participation, collaboration and empowerment (Fiorello et al. 2012). Fiorello used a Metastudy Analysis of Cases, but their method had two shortcomings, "...the dependent variable cannot be isolated and is arguably an indefinite factor… [and] tourism research... tends to be more qualitative than quantitative in nature" (2012, p 765). They looked at six case studies in their analysis and found that CBET is a developing phenomenon that is unique to other forms of ecotourism and sustainable tourism, with an emphasis on the conservation of nature and the empowerment of host communities (Fiorello et al. 2012). There are limitations due to the exploratory nature and qualitative research, that said their goal is to study the connection of the communities and tourists further to gain a more in-depth knowledge of that unique CBET experience (Fiorello et al. 2012).

Despite the benefits that Fiorello addresses with their CBET research, Devine and Ojeda discuss the darker underbelly with their key concepts, including tourism development, violence, dispossession and spatial fetishism and "using a critical geographical approach. [They] use the lens of dispossession to examine tourism's violent geographies because doing so renders clear the many ways that violence in tourism occurs" (2017, p 606). This article has a look at the implications of the tourism industry, unintentional or not on the host communities and their

guests, specifically with the idea that violence doesn't necessarily mean conflict (Devine et al. 2017). Local communities often take on the burden of tourism endeavours even though they are not getting to enjoy what is considered ideal in the tourist image, and that usually leads to dispossession (Devine et al. 2017). In summary, they hope their research inspires further research into the linkage between violence and tourism development, specifically the gender-based analysis that was absent from their studies; because understanding those connections is at the centre of creating a more sustainable and ethical form of tourism (Devine et al. 2017).

Fletcher takes the idea of violence in tourism development to the environmental side and explores the loss of 'natural' resources as a tourism experience within itself (2017). Anthropocene tourism is finding a way to renew through creative destruction, for example, it "shifts from selling an encounter with the glacier per se to selling an experience of its imminent disappearance" (Fletcher, 2017, p 1). Through an analysis grounded in a political-ecological perspective, Fletcher deems the tourism industry as "one of the world's most effective and creative forms of disaster capitalism" (2017, p 5). Disaster tourism, extinction tourism, voluntourism, development tourism and Anthropocene tourism creates what they call 'end-of-nature' tourism, what Fletcher suggests that "a more perfect circle of disaster capitalism would be difficult to imagine" (2017, p7). 'End-of-nature' tours seem to be the ongoing plan, but it has its limitations, and there has yet to be a 'fix' to make tourism truly sustainable in the long run (Fletcher, 2017).

"Tourism is notorious for its potential to disrupt, disturb, or otherwise do damage to natural habitats and local communities" (Stronza et al., 2008). We are looking for ways to create a more sustainable future, and these developments need to start in the 'host' communities (Fiorello et al. 2012) otherwise sticking to the western-centric framework (Cater et al. 2015) will continue to create violence and dispossession in tourism (Devine et al. 2017). Currently, the fix is to put a bandage on the issues by creating end-of-nature tours, which is unsustainable in the long run (Fletcher, 2017). That said, Stronza and Fiorello's research is from before Devine and Fletcher's, but their recommendations are not being implemented or addressed; therefore, further research is required in these areas considering we still face those same issues.

References

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