
III.27 Ecotourism

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Abstract

Ecotourism usually involves travelling to areas of natural and cultural interest. Ecotourism destinations' main assets are their biodiversity, especially watchable species and natural landscapes—this is why it may be an important tool for capitalizing on biodiversity and natural sites. Ecotourism has been associated with biodiversity, both as a strategy leading towards its conservation, and a possible threat to it. Although there are numerous guidelines and codes of conduct, the most important legal document dealing with ecotourism and biodiversity is the CBD Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism Development. The Guidelines highlight some key principles in sustainable tourism development: conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, fair and equitable sharing of benefits of tourism activities, and multi-stakeholder participation. This chapter reviews how these principles apply to ecotourism and sustainable tourism.

Keywords

Ecotourism, biodiversity, conservation, protected areas, benefit-sharing, multi-stakeholder participation

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III.27.1 Introduction

Tourism is one of the largest sectors of the world economy, corresponding to 10 per cent of the world GDP, according to the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).¹ Like other sectors, tourism is related to a series of social, economic, and environmental impacts.² Unsustainable tourism practices can result in habitat destruction, waste and pollution, invasive alien species, infrastructure development, and greenhouse gas emissions. It is a direct threat to biodiversity in many regions of the world. On the other hand,

¹ UNWTO (2015).

² See in general Mowforth and Munt (2003).

nature tourism is considered a human amenity, an environmental service provided by nature that has indirect use-value, which needs to be preserved for human welfare.

Following the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, states agreed on the need to reconcile environmentalism and development issues. A concept, portrayed as eco-development was subsequently incorporated into the strategic plans of many economic sectors. The tourism industry also had to revise itself in order to respond to new developments in international environmental law, and to try and adapt to new consumer trends,³ including, rejection of mass tourism, market segmentation, more information about alternative destinations, rapid turnover of tourism sites, and the growth of *green* tourism.⁴

Travellers from around the globe searched for alternative trips to protected areas in the tropics. These changes in consumer preferences have prompted a market response. New forms of tourism were promoted: with customized travel, smaller groups and far away destinations. Travellers and the industry sought areas of the world seen as naturally pristine, and culturally authentic, many of them located in 'megadiversity countries'⁵ and biodiversity hot spots.⁶ Biodiversity became recognized as central to tourism.

While the Stockholm Declaration (1972) and the Brundtland Report (1987)⁷ devoted little attention to tourism in particular, following their recommendations, the industry's own organizations, such as the World Tourism Organization and the World Travel and Tourism Council, outlined priority areas for action in terms of moving the tourism industry towards sustainable development. This is the case of the Hague Declaration on Tourism,⁸ which besides recognizing the intrinsic interrelationship between tourism and environment, called for the promotion of the integrated planning of tourism development on the basis of the concept of 'sustainable development'.⁹

Arising from the 1992 Rio Conference on Environment and Development, Agenda 21 detailed six common challenges and recommendations on promoting tourism in mountain, coastal and forested areas. Agenda 21 recommended countries to promote, as appropriate, environmentally sound leisure and tourism activities. In Chapter 11 Agenda 21 recommended that governments promote 'ecotourism' as a way to enhance sustainable forest management and planning.¹⁰ Agenda 21 mostly considered ecotourism as a market-mechanism to promote more comprehensive use and economic contributions of forest areas, to diversify mountain economies, and to generate income for local peoples.¹¹

This was followed by a number of guidelines and codes of conduct developed by the industry in attempts to integrate sustainability in the sector, such as: the Lanzarote

³ A survey among Condé Nast Traveler readers found that 96 per cent think hotels and resorts should be responsible for protecting the environment, Condé Nast Traveler (2007).

⁴ Lash and Urry (1994).

⁵ Mittermeier and Werner (1990) 4–5.

⁶ Gössling (1999) 303–320.

⁷ The only mention in the Brundtland Report is in regard to the promotion of wildlife tourism in protected areas. WCED (1987) para 65.

⁸ WTO (1989).

⁹ See Chapter 4 in this volume.

¹⁰ UNCED (1992) Agenda 21.

¹¹ *ibid.*

Charter for Sustainable Tourism;¹² Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry: Towards Environmental Sustainable Development;¹³ Guidelines for Environmentally Friendly Tourism;¹⁴ Global Code of Ethics for Tourism;¹⁵ Making Tourism More Sustainable: A Guide to Policy Makers;¹⁶ Practical Guide for the Development of Biodiversity-based Tourism Products;¹⁷ Tourism and Biodiversity: Achieving Common Goals Towards Sustainability.¹⁸

A number of international environmental agreements have also contributed towards providing guidelines for regulating tourism.¹⁹ For instance, a practical manual for the development of tourism in World Heritage sites was developed in 2002.²⁰ UNESCO published Guidelines for Tourism Planning in Biosphere Reserves in 2007.²¹ The Ramsar Convention recognized the value of sustainable tourism in and around wetlands for development, wetland conservation and wise use,²² and developed the publication 'Destination Wetlands: Supporting Sustainable Tourism' containing references to existing guidelines on developing and managing sustainable tourism.²³ All of these instruments have influenced tourism development and policy in many countries.

III.27.2 CBD Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism Development

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) calls upon states to conserve and use their biological resources in a sustainable manner,²⁴ to collaborate with *in-situ* conservation of ecosystems,²⁵ and to adopt incentives for conservation and sustainable use. The CBD provides differential obligations for different countries: developed countries parties are to provide resources to enable developing country parties to fulfil their obligations under the Convention,²⁶ such as the creation of a system of protected areas. Market-based conservation strategies became popular because donors privileged conservation projects that showed a prospect of future self-sufficiency after financial support ended.²⁷

Ecotourism fits nicely in the new paradigm because it advocated conservation and development goals, and was also a means to generate funds for protected areas. It was expected to produce an association between the generation of socioeconomic benefits

¹² WTO, UNESCO and UNEP (1995).

¹³ WTTC, WTO and Earth Council (1996).

¹⁴ UNEP (1995).

¹⁵ UNWTO (1999), The Global Code of Ethics for Tourism was adopted by resolution A/RES/406(XIII) at the thirteenth WTO General Assembly (Santiago, Chile, 27 September–1 October 1999).

¹⁶ UNEP and WTO (2005).

¹⁷ WTO (2010).

¹⁸ UNWTO (2010).

¹⁹ Ceballos-Lascurain (1986); Wood (2002).

²⁰ UNESCO (1992).

²¹ ETE and UNESCO (2007).

²² Ramsar Resolution XI.7 (2012) paras 1 and 2.

²³ Ramsar UNWTO (2012). See Chapters 8 and 13 in this volume.

²⁴ Convention on Biological Diversity (adopted 5 June 1992, entered into force 29 December 1993) 1760 UNTS 79 (CBD) Preamble (1992) para 3.

²⁵ CBD arts 1 and 8(m).

²⁶ CBD art 20 para 2. See Chapter 35 in this volume.

²⁷ Kiss (2004) 231–237.

to local populations and endorsement of conservation strategies in those natural areas where projects were developed. This was seen as an advantage of ecotourism over direct-payment for the conservation of biodiversity. The year 2002 was declared by United Nations the international year of ecotourism and the organization invested US\$ 7 billion in 320 tourism-related projects with 21 development agencies.²⁸

The CBD Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) prepared an assessment that discussed tourism in relation to the CBD's objectives.²⁹ In 2000, CBD parties³⁰ endorsed the assessment, and provided a specific definition for ecotourism: 'tourism that relies on the existence and maintenance of biological diversity and habitats'. On that occasion, CBD parties also accepted the invitation to participate in an international work programme on sustainable tourism development under the UN Commission on Sustainable Development.³¹ A workshop on tourism and biodiversity then produced 'Draft International Guidelines on Sustainable Tourism in Vulnerable Ecosystems', which were submitted to the World Summit on Ecotourism, held in Québec City in May 2002. The Summit issued the Québec Declaration on Ecotourism, recognizing that ecotourism embraces the following principles:

[It] contributes actively to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage; includes local and indigenous communities in its planning, development and operation, and contributing to their well-being; interprets the natural and cultural heritage of the destination to visitors; lends itself better to independent travellers, as well as to organized tours for small size groups.³²

On that basis, CBD parties adopted voluntary Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism Development in 2004,³³ recommending that international organizations³⁴ take these Guidelines into account in their activities; to provide technical and financial assistance in the implementation of the Guidelines, and consider the Guidelines when preparing, approving and funding tourism development projects.³⁵

The Guidelines aim at providing assistance to stakeholders at all levels to apply the provisions of the Convention to the sustainable development and management of tourism policies, strategies, projects and activities. They provide a framework for tourism proponents and authorities to implement and monitor sustainable tourism.

The Guidelines were established as a framework to 'maximize the positive benefits of

²⁸ Zeppel (2006) 6, citing Selverston-Scher, 'Indigenous people and international finance and development institutions'.

²⁹ This assessment, with very minor modifications, was adopted by COP 5 as the annex to Decision V/25 (2000).

³⁰ CBD Decision V/25 (2000). Biological diversity and tourism.

³¹ CBD COP Decision V/25 (2000) para 2; the international work programme was undertaken by the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Environment Programme, the Commission on Sustainable Development and the World Tourism Organization.

³² Québec Declaration on Ecotourism, World Ecotourism Summit, hosted in Québec City, Canada, by Tourisme Québec and the Canadian Tourism Commission, between 19 and 22 May 2002.

³³ CBD COP Decision VII/14 (2004) para 1, annex.

³⁴ Such as the World Tourism Organization, the UN Conference on Trade and Development, the UNDP, the World Bank, World Trade Organization, and regional development banks.

³⁵ CBD COP Decision VII/14 (2004) para 9.

tourism to biodiversity, ecosystems, and economic and social development, and of biodiversity to tourism, while minimizing negative social and environmental impacts from tourism'.³⁶ They highlight key principles in sustainable tourism development: conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, fair and equitable sharing of benefits of tourism activities, and multi-stakeholder participation. This chapter will review how these principles apply to ecotourism and sustainable tourism.

III.27.3 Principles of CBD and ecotourism

III.27.3.1 *Ecotourism and conservation*

The CBD acknowledges that the fundamental requirement for conservation of biodiversity is the *in-situ* conservation of ecosystems and natural habitats.³⁷ It defines *in-situ* conservation as conservation of ecosystems and natural habitats and the maintenance and recovery of viable populations of species in their natural surroundings.³⁸ Nature conservation is understood to be any action or practice that prevents or mitigates degradation of habitats and resources and is designed to do so.³⁹ So conservation is associated to people—their actions, their needs, their motives.

Ecotourism destinations' main assets are their biodiversity. The CBD Guidelines emphasize that ecotourism developers have a direct commercial interest in maintaining the vulnerable ecosystem in a good condition,⁴⁰ especially watchable species and natural landscapes. This is why ecotourism activity is seen to play a role as an opportunity to increase the value of forests through its non-damaging uses,⁴¹ and as a strategy for capitalizing on biodiversity and natural sites.⁴²

It is also closely related to *in-situ* conservation,⁴³ since it works under the assumption that when local communities benefit directly from biodiversity, they may have incentives to prevent threats to it.⁴⁴ And ecotourism is supposed to help strengthen local efforts against threats to biodiversity by building skills and the political empowerment of local communities.⁴⁵

The CBD Guidelines encourage governments to use political and economic measures to encourage the channelling of part of tourism revenues towards supporting the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, such as conservation of protected areas, education, research programmes, or local community development.⁴⁶

According to the UN Secretary-General, Ban-Ki Moon:

³⁶ CBD Guidelines (2004) para 22.

³⁷ CBD Preamble para 11.

³⁸ CBD art 2, para 8.

³⁹ Smith and Wishnie (2000) 493–524.

⁴⁰ CBD Guidelines (2004) para 44.

⁴¹ UN Agenda 21 s II art 11.

⁴² Wunder (2000) 465–479.

⁴³ CBD art 2 defines *in-situ* conservation as 'conservation of ecosystems and natural habitats and the maintenance and recovery of viable populations of species in their natural surroundings'.

⁴⁴ Stronza and Pegas (2008) 263–279.

⁴⁵ Stronza and Gordillo (2008) 448–468.

⁴⁶ CBD Guidelines (2004) para 28.

The income generated by sustainable tourism can provide important support for nature conservation, as well as for economic development. Furthermore, sustainable tourism can help to raise awareness among tourists and local communities of the importance of biodiversity to our everyday lives.⁴⁷

Buckley affirms that the most important outcome of ecotourism is its potential to favourably influence public policies towards parks and conservation, including legislation, budgets and land tenure.⁴⁸ But another way ecotourism may help conservation advocacy is by educating⁴⁹ and encouraging ecotourists to value ecosystem conservation in the future. Tourism is seen as a vehicle for promoting awareness of the importance of biodiversity and the urgent need for its conservation. But links between interpretation, knowledge, attitudes and behaviour have rarely been tested empirically.⁵⁰

III.27.3.2 Ecotourism and sustainable use of biodiversity

CBD parties considered sustainable use as a cross-cutting issue,⁵¹ and placed the relationship between biodiversity and tourism within the context of sustainable use.⁵² Sustainable use is defined by the CBD as ‘the use of components of biological diversity in a way and at a rate that does not lead to the long-term decline of biological diversity, thereby maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of present and future generations’.⁵³ The Convention calls on its parties to adopt measures to avoid or minimize adverse impacts on biodiversity.⁵⁴ For tourism to be considered sustainable it should foster the use of resources so as to minimize its impacts in all dimensions of sustainability (social, economic and environmental).

Impact assessment⁵⁵ and management are therefore central to sustainable tourism and ecotourism. The Guidelines take into consideration impacts that tourism may have not only on biodiversity but also on cultural and economic assets, on the basis of other CBD guidance, namely the ‘Guidelines for incorporating biodiversity-related issues into environmental impact assessment legislation and/or processes and in strategic environmental assessment’⁵⁶ and the ‘Akwé: Kon voluntary guidelines for impact assessment on sacred sites and on lands and waters’.⁵⁷

Besides impact assessment, the Guidelines stress the importance of establishing proposals for impact management in any tourism development.⁵⁸ Minimization of negative outcomes is a task investors, developers and practitioners must take on in ecotourism

⁴⁷ Secretary-General’s message on World Tourism Day, New York, 27 September 2010. Available at: <http://www.un.org/sg/STATEMENTS/index.asp?nid=4817> (accessed 7 January 2016).

⁴⁸ Buckley (2009) 3.

⁴⁹ Orams (1997) 295–306.

⁵⁰ Marion and Reed (2007) 5–27.

⁵¹ CBD COP Decision V/24 (2000).

⁵² CBD COP Decision V/25 (2000).

⁵³ CBD art 2, para 16.

⁵⁴ CBD art 10, para 2.

⁵⁵ See Chapter 31 in this volume.

⁵⁶ COP Decision VI/7 (2002) Annex (paras 1–24).

⁵⁷ COP Decision VII/16 (2004) Section F.

⁵⁸ CBD Guidelines (2004) para 44.

enterprises. The CBD Guidelines propose that tourism should be planned and managed using the internationally accepted planning methodologies (such as the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum and the Limits of Acceptable Change).⁵⁹

Promoting the design of facilities that are more eco-efficient, which adopt the cleaner production approach, and use environmentally sound technologies, hotels and destinations have to invest heavily to minimize negative impacts, for example, through ‘incorporation of local and recycled materials; renewable energy sources and efficient water supply systems; recycling especially of catering items and other small consumables; and low-impact sewage and wastewater treatment technologies’,⁶⁰ using renewable sources of energy, and monitoring trail impacts on fauna, as well as creating codes of conduct for visitors.

One has to consider the availability of technical expertise and the role of technological access when addressing impact management in tourism. Both expertise and eco-efficient technologies may be unavailable in many developing countries where most biodiversity-related tourism is developed. Since CBD Article 16 states that access and transfer of technology among parties are essential to attain the objectives of the Convention, it is paramount that they should be provided under fair and most favourable terms.

III.27.3.3 Ecotourism and benefit-sharing

The CBD recognized the close dependency of indigenous and local communities on biological resources, and pointed to the need for sharing benefits arising from the use of traditional knowledge relevant to the sustainable use of biodiversity and its components.⁶¹ The CBD Guidelines establish as one of their goals ‘fair and equitable sharing of benefits of tourism activities, with emphasis on the specific needs of the indigenous and local communities concerned’.⁶² Benefit-sharing is regarded as a way of strengthening indigenous and local communities and promoting the CBD objectives.

The CBD Guidelines comprehend benefits in various forms, such as: job creation, fostering local enterprises, participation in tourism enterprises and projects, education, direct investment opportunities, economic linkages and ecological services.⁶³ Studies that focus on economic impacts show that ecotourism does serve as a new source of income for local people: ‘for many indigenous communities, particularly in tropical developing countries, ecotourism has indeed represented a first or stronger connection to capitalist markets’.⁶⁴ Local economies may benefit from new job opportunities and economic diversification which may help households in times of risk and uncertainty.⁶⁵

A lot of ecotourism benefits are non-economic, though they are rarely analysed.⁶⁶ Distribution of benefits and synergies with other economic activities should also be

⁵⁹ CBD Guidelines (2004) para 45.

⁶⁰ *ibid* 11.

⁶¹ CBD Preamble.

⁶² CBD Guidelines (2004) para 2(c).

⁶³ CBD Guidelines (2004) para 23.

⁶⁴ Stronza (2007) 210–221.

⁶⁵ Stronza (2009) 56–77.

⁶⁶ Stronza and Gordillo (2008) 448–468.

taken into account.⁶⁷ Non-cash benefits are also fundamental in promoting trust and cooperation between key stakeholders (important intangible assets in any business).⁶⁸

On the other hand, ecotourism may also generate economic leakages, when revenue is concentrated in larger international companies and not local businesses.⁶⁹ Much of the tourism industry is controlled by financial interests located away from tourist destinations.⁷⁰ For Cohen ‘the benefits accruing to the local community, even if significant relative to other sources of income, usually constitute only a fraction of the profits generated by the enterprise’.⁷¹ Bookbinder’s study in Nepal found that the economic impact of ecotourism on household income was minimal and limited to the villages closest to the main park’s entrance.⁷²

Its scale is also an important variable.⁷³ Stem showed that where ecotourism dominates local economies, towns may become economically vulnerable.⁷⁴ In addition, tourism in general and ecotourism in particular is very sensitive to uncontrolled external threats, such as currency fluctuations, local social crises and economic crises in other countries.

Benefit-sharing is thus seen as a central issue in ecotourism.⁷⁵ When benefits are not evenly distributed, ecotourism may exacerbate existing resource conflicts within the community, due to, among other reasons, a perception that the costs of protecting the natural area are borne collectively and its benefits individually.⁷⁶

When significant economic impacts do exist, they do not always act to improve local standards of living—research findings depend on initial assumptions. For example, if a researcher assumes that introducing new work opportunities and raising income for local populations is positive, then ecotourism is seen to be meeting its claims. If a researcher does not take this for granted, and asks further questions on the impacts of employment and rise of income, and on the distribution of benefits, other consequences (not all positive) may be found.⁷⁷

Academic literature in anthropology and geography cites conflicts between ecotourism and enterprises and traditional activities, such as hunting, smallholder agriculture, and other land use activities, or evidence of local communities becoming excessively dependent on the industry and their economies less resilient.⁷⁸ Other impacts also may occur, such as the concentration of public investment, and a rise in the price of goods and services, land speculation, reduced access and insecurity of land tenure, as well

⁶⁷ Wilkinson and Pratiwi (1995) 283–299.

⁶⁸ Salafsky (2001) 1585–1595.

⁶⁹ Fennell (2003) 122; Steele (1995) 29–44.

⁷⁰ CBD COP Decision V/23 (2000) para 7.

⁷¹ Cohen (2002) 267–276.

⁷² Bookbinder and others (1998) 1399–1404.

⁷³ Hall (2007) 244.

⁷⁴ Stem and others (2003a) 322–347.

⁷⁵ Salafsky (2001) 1585–1595; Stronza (2007) 211.

⁷⁶ Coria and Calfucura (2012) 47–55; Peralta (2012) 91.

⁷⁷ Peralta (2012) 75–94; Scheyvens (1999) 245–249; Stem and others (2003b) 387–414.

⁷⁸ UNEP, Negative Economic Impacts of Tourism. Available at: <http://www.unep.org/resource/efficiency/Business/SectoralActivities/Tourism/FactsandFiguresaboutTourism/ImpactsofTourism/EconomicImpactsofTourism/NegativeEconomicImpactsofTourism/tabid/78784/Default.aspx> (accessed 15 March 2016).

as dislocation of populations from areas destined to ecotourism enterprises.⁷⁹ These outcomes, however, are entirely dependent on specific social context and dynamics.

III.27.3.4 Ecotourism and multi-stakeholder participation

Besides sharing benefits, the CBD Guidelines state that tourism management should be based on a consultative process involving various stakeholders.⁸⁰ In the case of ecotourism, the key role of local populations in planning and development has also been recognized because 'indigenous homelands rich in biodiversity are the prime target of most ecotourism'.⁸¹ Participation and control by indigenous and local people in the planning and development of ecotourism is both a strategy aimed towards ecotourism sustainability, as well as a right, with a particular emphasis on community-based and -owned ecotourism enterprises.⁸² According to Drumm, indigenous community-based ecotourism involves 'ecotourism programs which take place under the control and active participation of local people who inhabit a natural attraction'.⁸³

Salafsky and others conducted analysis on the conditions under which ecotourism would lead to conservation.⁸⁴ Their findings showed a weak association between business success and conservation, but a strong association between the latter and local involvement in the enterprise (through management and ownership). Baral and others, analysing integrated development and conservation projects in general, found that failure to devolve power and control over projects to local leadership led to diminishing participation, since members lose interest.⁸⁵

For Coria and Calfucura, the success of ecotourism is dependent on three main factors: (i) distribution of benefits; (ii) community control over land and resources; and (iii) power relations between stakeholders.⁸⁶ A study that aimed to assess the support of community residents for sustainable tourism development showed that increased involvement in decision-making processes and perceived benefits of tourism are fundamental to attaining local support.⁸⁷

The CBD Guidelines state that:

consistent with Article 8(j), decision-making should include meaningful consultation with indigenous and local communities affected by projects in order to ensure, *inter alia*, respect for the customs and traditional knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities, and adequate funding and technical support for effective participation.⁸⁸

But ecotourism has often failed to include local people in decision making due to 'shortages in the endowments of human, financial and social capital within the community,

⁷⁹ West and others (2006) 251–277; Honey (2008) 14.

⁸⁰ CBD Guidelines (2004) Introduction para 4.

⁸¹ Johnston (2000) 89–96.

⁸² Jones (2005) 303–324.

⁸³ Drumm (1998) 197.

⁸⁴ Salafsky (2001).

⁸⁵ Baral and others (2007) 2903–2917.

⁸⁶ Coria and Calfucura (2012) 49.

⁸⁷ Lee (2012) 37–46.

⁸⁸ CBD Guidelines (2004) para 56. See Chapter 19 in this volume.

lack of mechanisms for a fair distribution of the economic benefits of ecotourism, and land insecurity'.⁸⁹

Full participation in decision-making processes depends on stakeholders' means and resources.⁹⁰ Small community members often face many obstacles, such as absence of clear land tenure rights, absence of public policies that would help community-owned enterprises to integrate the market, inexperience with finance and marketing management, low levels of schooling, etc. Power structures among stakeholders are unequal, and although indigenous populations are considered key to the success of ecotourism, for Hilario, 'they lack political and economic power to negotiate freely and evenly with governments, private entities, and international institutions'.⁹¹

This is precisely what Canada pointed out during negotiations of the CBD Guidelines:

consultation processes need to include more than information-sharing. There must be a willingness to share control. A key to sustainable tourism is local control of tourism. There needs to be mutual learning, including appropriate ways to access traditional and community-based knowledge of local stakeholders, including indigenous communities. A process based on consensus-building is quite different from consultation.⁹²

III.27.4 Gaps and challenges

Ecotourism is likely to continue to grow in the next decade, particularly in those vulnerable ecosystems home to earth's biodiversity. Recognition of the role and importance of ecotourism to respond to threats to biodiversity has manifested in a number of international guidelines, treaties and resolutions.⁹³ Nevertheless, the majority of states have yet to implement these decisions and strategies.⁹⁴ The sovereign right of states to exploit their natural resources pursuant to their own environmental policies, which is recognized by the CBD,⁹⁵ often contradicts sustainability guidelines.

Ecotourism, like sustainable development itself, is full of contradictions. For example, while generating income for local populations, it may increase environmental impacts on biodiversity. It calls for eco-efficient technologies that are unavailable. In addition, part of the industry simply uses ecotourism labels to *green wash* unsustainable businesses. CBD parties have pointed out how 'economic considerations are still dominant in the decision-making processes in the tourism sector, and environmental and biodiversity considerations have not become an integral component of tourism planning'.⁹⁶ Another urgent challenge is the tourist industry's close relationship to climate change, since it is estimated to accounts for 5 per cent of global CO₂ emissions. Thus regulation must be adopted to encourage truly sustainable tourism that reflects a 'quadruple bottom line' of environmental, social, economic and climate responsiveness.⁹⁷

⁸⁹ Coria and Calfucura (2012) 47–55.

⁹⁰ Jamal and Getz (1999) 290–313.

⁹¹ Hilario (2008) 100.

⁹² CBD COP Decision VI/12 (2002) Add. 2.

⁹³ For example, the Global Code of Ethics (2010), Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (2012).

⁹⁴ Hall (2010) 275.

⁹⁵ CBD art 3. See Chapter 2 in this volume.

⁹⁶ CBD COP Decision VI/12 (2002) Add. 2.

⁹⁷ DAVOS Declaration on Climate Change and Tourism (2007) para 3.

If ecotourism is going to move from a good concept to good practices, it must be measured against clear standards.⁹⁸ To separate the wheat from the chaff, international certification programmes have been advocated.⁹⁹ Certification, as a voluntary mechanism, implies that businesses try and achieve a certificate of excellence, and are assessed by auditors for their performance on environmental, economic and social criteria. It is advocated to be an instrument to promote best practices by businesses, as well as guaranteeing the rights of workers and the satisfaction of visitors. But historical observation indicates that self-regulation of the tourism industry for sustainable use of biological resources has only rarely been successful.¹⁰⁰ Since it is a costly, complex, and time-consuming process, few locally-owned businesses may be able to invest in the accreditation programmes' requirements.¹⁰¹ This may be why detractors of the certification process understand it as 'a method to exclude, to cartelize the market, so that the weak lose their autonomy and come under the hegemony of the strong'.¹⁰² Legal research should focus on international certification, as well as on the interaction between international trade agreements and biodiversity-related tourism.¹⁰³

Public-private partnerships have recently become more central in ecotourism planning and development and encouraged by international agencies. UNDP has recently published guidelines for tourism concessions in protected areas, understanding that 'by looking for opportunities to work with concessionaires, agencies can do more for conservation and visitors to their protected areas and help produce a range of financial, economic and social benefits'.¹⁰⁴ This strategy, where appropriate, needs to be monitored, especially in areas of international biodiversity importance, such as Biosphere Reserves, World Heritage sites and Ramsar sites.

III.27.5 Conclusions

Ecotourism was born within the rationale of the ecological modernization paradigm¹⁰⁵—an approach that assumes that environmental problems and impacts (such as those of the tourism industry) may be dealt with technology and education. A compendium of ecotourism case studies, for example, tried to establish which variable would be most important in minimizing the environmental impacts of ecotourism—technology, education, location or client selection.¹⁰⁶ So, to the industry, ecotourism may represent business as usual, since is a market-oriented strategy with many environmental impacts. Nevertheless, in the long run its *impacts* are minor if compared to other land use strategies such as mining, ranching and the construction of roads and hydroelectric power stations.

⁹⁸ Honey (2008) 113.

⁹⁹ International accreditation bodies such as the Green Globe 21 and Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council, Honey (2008) 47; Font and others (2003) 213–218.

¹⁰⁰ CBD COP Decision V/23 (2000) para 6.

¹⁰¹ Issaverdis (2001) 590.

¹⁰² Cater (2006) 26 citing Rao (2001).

¹⁰³ See Chapter 23 in this volume.

¹⁰⁴ Tourism Concessions in Protected Natural Areas: Guidelines for Managers UNDP (2014). See Chapter 28 in this volume.

¹⁰⁵ Mol and Spaargaren (2000) 17–49.

¹⁰⁶ Buckley (2003) 2.

Development of ecotourism relies on sustainable market-integration of land, which, in turn, also makes both land and their claimants more visible to government agencies, and policy makers. So ecotourism may be an important tool to 'reinforce land claims, acknowledge cultural identity and land ownership, and regain their rights to access or use tribal land and resources'.¹⁰⁷ A research agenda should be developed to investigate the premises of the CBD Guidelines, and the level of compliance with their goals and standards. Research should advance into assessing whether market-oriented instruments are actually effective in preventing biodiversity loss. Furthermore, there needs to be more independent research on a global scale, since most information on progress towards the implementation of CBD Guidelines is provided by States.

Finally, research methods should be more heterogeneous. In 2010 CBD parties recognized that respect for traditional knowledge requires that it is valued equally with and complementary to scientific knowledge.¹⁰⁸ But research on ecotourism is mainly carried out by western scientists, and is usually funded by international agencies that privilege western-centric views of nature and societies, reproducing these views in the resulting analyses.

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