

ECOTOURISM EMERGING INDUSTRY FORUM

Ecotourism Emerging Industry Forum

Organized by Planeta.com and EplerWood International

November 1-18, 2005

Funded by participants, the SNV Netherlands Development Organisation, Conservation International and Balam Consultores. Additional support comes from USAID, and the Development Gateway.



DEVELOPMENT
GATEWAY

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Preface

The Ecotourism Emerging Industry Forum is a fine example of quality dialogue and information sharing. This forum was previewed a year in advance, developed in coordination with a dozen mom and pop businesses (also called SMEs or small and medium-sized enterprises), conducted over three weeks and included public access to the dialogue.

The forum was a showcase of creative collaboration. Having an extended lead time permitted conversations about the real needs of today's SMEs and donors seeking entry into sustainable tourism financing. We called upon colleagues to facilitate the discussion, and these moderators provided their expertise as well as guidance.

We are pleased to present the executive summary, final recommendations and edited transcript from the Ecotourism Emerging Industry Forum.

Executive Summary

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Navigating the Document

The Table of Contents is the hub of the document. The transcript has been enhanced with hyperlinks to each section of the document, including appendices. Lengthy topics have been divided by hyper linking to the case studies mentioned; *Marketing and Marketing Development* has been divided into main themes. This set of hyperlinks can be found on each page of the document for navigational ease.

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Executive Summary

The Emerging Industry Forum was broken down into 7 dialogue areas: *Developing Infrastructure for Sustainable Tourism, Private Sector/Public Sector Collaboration, Finance for SMEs, Communities and SMEs, Marketing and Market Development, Interpretive Programs, Triple Bottom Line Business Structures and Strategies* each of which resulted in a dialogue that was characterized by excellent insights into the state of the art of developing ecotourism as a sustainable development tool. Participants discussed the projects they themselves had developed, the challenges they faced, and the possibilities for improving future ecotourism investment. Extra care was taken to involve the private sector, which frequently does not take part in dialogues regarding ecotourism at international forums. Because this was an on-line dialogue, open for posts throughout a 3 week period in November 2005, there was an excellent opportunity for busy participants to share their experiences without having to attend a traditional event.

Developing Infrastructure for Sustainable Tourism

Participants found that ecotourism projects, as opposed to larger sustainable tourism projects, are frequently solving infrastructure problems in remote natural areas, at the lodge level without the benefit of opportunity to plan at the regional or destination level. It was remarked that “building green” is a regional issue and that planning at this scale is essential. However, it was noted that rural areas frequently do not get the benefit of larger scale infrastructure planning, because the taxes generated in rural areas will not provide the internal rate of return governments need to justify building the infrastructure required.

In the case of the Cree Village Ecolodge and the new Wa-show James Bay Wilderness Lodge on native lands in northern Canada, the project developers found they had to cope with solving infrastructure issues without the benefit of local municipalities or with any regional infrastructure program that was underway. In order to meet sustainability goals, the project was forced to pay a very high cost to obtain sustainable technologies without the benefit of the economy of scale that could be achieved if more projects were clustered in the area, or if the government were providing sustainable technology solutions as part of a larger program for the region.

Larger scale investments in sustainable tourism, such as the current Inter-American Development Bank Investment in Tela, Honduras have carefully linked sustainable infrastructure development, with the development of mainstream tourism, working diligently to ensure the footprint of the large-scale Tela development is not a burden on the local, fragile environment of coastal Honduras. Many environmental impact studies were done, and financing for the project includes full scale sustainable infrastructure, an Audubon certified golf course, and grants to the coastal protected area adjacent to the development. However, it was found by Megan Epler Wood as part of her USAID consultancy in the Tela region, from which she was reporting during the forum, that in fact this sustainable infrastructure planning will not reach beyond the immediate dense development zone, and that two important protected areas and a highly vulnerable watershed were to be left unprotected, despite the fact that they were found within the zone

between the regional airport La Ceiba and the Tela project. In the case of Honduras, the watershed in this corridor is highly prone to flooding and erosion, and the traditional communities have had little contact with tourism to date. A spiral of uncontrolled development could lead to communities selling land to speculators resulting in poor land-use, undermining of local community livelihoods and values, and watershed destruction. Unfortunately, the USAID project on sustainable tourism in this area was discontinued shortly after her visit due to budget cuts, and no further actions were taken based on the report – despite government approval and validation of its results.

The lessons here are that ecotourism and regional sustainable infrastructure planning must be linked, and that sustainable infrastructure planning must incorporate not only the areas where dense tourism development is planned, but where high probability “sprawl” corridors in fragile natural areas with vulnerable local communities exist. Planning for sustainable infrastructure at the regional level is still in its infancy, with few projects taking such considerations into account. It is therefore recommended to donors that ecotourism planning be linked to larger integrated development planning programs on a regional scale.

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Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)

It was concluded that experiences in the public-private development of ecotourism and sustainable tourism are still limited – except in the field of tourism marketing. Some outstanding examples of public private planning in Canada with First Nations were brought forward: The Quu’as West Coast Trail Society, the Clayoquot Sound World Biosphere Reserve, and Haidi Gwail, Queen Charlotte Islands. It was pointed out that these successes must be attributed to the sustained outreach and investment by the Canadian government.

Experts working in transition economies noted, they must first seek to foster the strength and quality of business development practices to help ensure the business community is independent and has adequate capacity before re-introducing prospects for public involvement to ensure there is a proper balance between the public and private parties, to make the PPP concept work.

NGO representatives suggested they can help facilitate a more progressive relationship between governments seeking to attract more investment to generate jobs, and companies that are seeking tax breaks and concessions from government to improve profitability. It was observed that middle ground objectives must be created to make PPPs functional. Governments must increasingly seek to meet the needs of industry by providing proper land-use planning and adequate, sustainable infrastructure, while at the same time leveraging private investment. The private sector needs to manage “risks” in a new context, including not only health and safety for clients, but also environmental protection and local social welfare.

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Finance for SMEs

A question was raised by FRI Ecological Services on why the firm faced so much difficulty raising finance for their proposed tourism project in Guyana despite the fact there was \$5 million available from donors. It was noted that the cost of working with donors was far too high for small scale ecotourism developers to consider.

It was mentioned that using a hybrid model of financing a private sector project through traditional means, but allying with NGOs or creating a NGO partner as part of corporate development to raise grants to pay for external costs, such as environmental conservation and social welfare, is a model that has been successful for some companies, such as Rainforest Expeditions.

It was noted that because donors have asked private sector firms to work using NGO models, many unrealistic ecotourism plans have been developed that have resulted in failed enterprises. Because donors have also financed NGOs to develop ecotourism enterprises, there are many poorly managed ecotourism enterprises now seeking to reorganize their ecotourism operations into private business models.

A specific case in Central America was brought up where a leading NGO was developing a business plan for expansion of their ecotourism program requesting “investment” without offering any rate of return. The NGO was dependent on ecotourism for its operational costs, and was mixing the concept of donation without return with investment which must have a return. The NGO’s ecotourism enterprise was being hindered from growth by poor business planning, finance, and management systems despite the fact they had a relatively successful operation. Their inability to separate ecotourism business from their NGO management model was stifling the potential of their ecotourism enterprise.

The overall approach of donors to provide NGOs with the funding to develop enterprises was discussed, and most agreed that a new more business friendly approach to ecotourism development, which fosters small businesses directly, and does not hinge on working with NGOs would be more productive

Financing community enterprises was also discussed, and Canyon Travel, a small private sector firm noted they have had good success financing community enterprises, creating a win-win between the firm and their community partners. But this firm also commented that it is still a challenge to maintain their “ecovision” while trying to justify the higher costs of operating in a remote location with community employment agreements – when other competitors do not embrace the same responsibilities or costs.

Overall it was clear that small businesses will need specially designed financing from donors to meet all the objectives of ecotourism while providing the appropriate business and marketing models for enterprise success.

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Communities and SMEs

It was agreed from the beginning of the forum that most participants felt that donors need to support joint ventures between communities and the private sector as the best option for fostering viable enterprises. Nomadic Journeys and Tropic Ecological Adventures offered their examples of partnering with local communities to develop viable, marketable on-going enterprises in their regions.

However, it was noted that when business is established in sites where poverty is high, infrastructure is poor, and ethnic differences tend to be sensitive -- donors need to help business to be very responsive to these issues.

One area of technical assistance to assist business that was recommended is the advance profiling of social, political, and livelihood strategies in communities before enterprise development efforts are launched. It was also recommended that any training programs offered should be done less in the class-room and more on-the-scene.

An Inuit community tourism development example in Pangniitung was provided which pointed out the benefits for local communities of controlling tourism development through contracts with tour operators and organized groups – while avoiding independent visitors. Other guidelines offered were to provide communities with an advance knowledge of the pros and cons of tourism, and to develop a community strategy for tourism development that invites the opportunity for private sector investment, with on-going monitoring of the project.

Wildland Adventure's involvement with the Maasai Environmental Resource Coalition led them to recommend community partners that have strong leadership, and advisory decision making board, and the involvement of tour operators from very early in the project development process.

It was pointed out that community involvement in project development takes considerable time and often consultants are not given the time required. This job is often given to NGOs who lack an understanding of ecotourism project development, thereby not giving the community's input in appropriately phased and designed project development procedures. Even in Canada, it was noted that the time to develop community-led project processes is rarely supported.

Community based tourism marketing support has often led to unsatisfactory outcomes for the communities. It was agreed that it is insufficient to establish websites on behalf of the communities without determining how the community will manage visitor inquiries, bookings, and the maintenance and up-dating of the website.

Overall, it was noted that community based tourism needs to be planned like all businesses, with business planning, feasibility studies, infrastructure planning and training. In addition there needs to be additional time allowed and support from donors for community involvement procedures, and operational support once the enterprises are up and running for a reasonable period of time. Rarely can all these development phases for community based ecotourism start-ups be supported within a 3 year project window, and this leaves many communities either improperly prepared, inadequately involved in all phases of planning, or with insufficient operations and marketing systems.

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Marketing and Market Development

A question was asked at the beginning of this topic, how to increase competitiveness and profitability of tourism SMEs in high biodiversity areas? How do we effectively grow these businesses? How do we encourage outbound eco/adventure operators to partner and promote SMEs?

The consensus was that there needs to be stronger support of market-based approaches that would attract business partnering and reinforce supply chains, and bolster effective marketing through existing supply chains – not by reinventing the wheel and attempting to market outside existing market supply and demand structures.

The question was raised if certification can be an effective marketing tool. While most participants pointed out that there is no evidence that certification leverages markets, and that in fact consumers are almost entirely unaware of tourism certification, it was pointed out that in Sweden an effective branding campaign, *Nature's Best*, has both achieved market recognition and helped bring accountability to the industry through certification. This is being achieved through a public-private partnership that has strong industry buy-in and is working as a destination marketing tool. In other countries, most agreed that business alliances, not certification, are needed to achieve improved market reach for ecotourism. But many felt that ecotourism as a term, though increasingly used by travelers, is still not a term the industry embraces.

Internet marketing was found to be a challenge for some NGOs and community projects, but most participants remarked that it levels the playing field and is highly cost effective.

Overall the priority of understanding market channels, and creating marketing systems that can bring together and ally SMEs and their community partners on a regional basis to improve cost-effectiveness of ecotourism marketing for each alliance member was endorsed as the most likely tactic to create a viable system for improving marketing effectiveness for ecotourism companies.

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Interpretive Programs

The pivotal nature of naturalist guides was raised immediately as the leading “asset” that gives one ecotourism company or project a market edge over another.

Other ideas such as geo-caching as a new tool for raising excitement about visiting new areas and lesser known regions was mentioned and other technology tools, such as creating a CD of local sounds or developing a personalized GPS map of places each client visits were suggested as interpretative program “value added.”

It was pointed out that indigenous guides are often trained by biologists and this can actually cause them to undervalue their own knowledge of local plants and animals, in favor of learning

scientific names. It was suggested that indigenous guides should be trained to value their own knowledge and to share their own stories, legends and local names. It was pointed out in response that some groups, such as birders, require scientific names for educational purposes, but that most general ecotourists do not.

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Triple Bottom Line Business Structures and Strategies

Certification became the main topic of discussion in this part of the forum. However, it was discussed not only as a tool to foster best practice, but to ensure quality control. And it was put into the context of its economic feasibility, contribution to market access, and accessibility to micro and small enterprises in developing countries.

Some parties felt more research is still required on the value of ecotourism certification, while others pointed out that millions of dollars of donor funds have been spent and that there is still a divided opinion on its value. Participants pointed out that to date certification has gained a foothold in only a few localities, such as Australia and Sweden – noticeably developed countries, with good tax bases, excellent infrastructure, and a significant amount of heterogeneity in their business tactical thinking. It was pointed out that experimenting with this approach in developing countries where ecotourism is still emerging as a business economy is risky. Participants pointed out that when nations are poor and investment is scarce, attention first needs to be devoted to competitive enterprise development, job creation, and economic outcomes at the macro and local levels. It was further noted that “best practice workshops” which have become widespread in the developing world, via donor support, are unlikely to result in outcomes of any lasting value until businesses have profits.

The value of Build, Operate and Transfer (BOT) models that attract private sector investment in community lodges with a return on investment built in, joint operation programs, and transfer of the property to the community at the end of the project are still undergoing review. No project has yet transferred its assets to the community as yet, as the model generally includes 20 or more years of joint operations before transfer takes place and no project has yet hit the 20 year turn over date. These projects have provided a good deal of security and long-term business functionality to demanding projects in remote regions, but may hit a difficult period when the time of transfer is required.

The value of Corporate Social Responsibility reporting was discussed and it was revealed that tourism as an industrial sector has been slow to embrace the ideal of CSR reporting. While UNEP invested considerable funds in reporting guidelines for the tourism industry through the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), it was found subsequent to the forum via inquiry that few if any tourism businesses have used the reporting guidelines according to staff working at GRI.

While ecotourism certification should not be abandoned as a tool to achieve sustainability, and quite a few participants underwrote their thinking that it deserves considerable attention and effort -- it is unlikely to produce results for years according to excellent research on the matter quoted in the forum. It therefore represents a highly risky investment in developing country

economies that should only be considered by donors after a competitive, ecotourism economy has been established.

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Final Recommendations

Sustainability requires the involvement of governments, business, and NGOs. At present, donors have largely focused on funding best practice of businesses, NGO technical support of local enterprises and protected areas, and community enterprise development. This supply side approach has not been fully connected to the marketplace and as a result has not resulted in viable enterprise development and has not adequately used the existing power of private sector supply chains to create more vibrant ecotourism economies around the world that could do much more to sustain local communities and conserve local environments.

To create a strategy that will both facilitate investment in sustainable tourism and foster greater sustainability on a larger scale, donors will need to work directly with governments on the provision of adequate sustainable infrastructure in order to develop sustainable tourism and ecotourism on a regional scale. At present ecotourism developers are largely working without governmental or donor support to help them create an economy of scale for their efforts.

While public private planning of tourism is still new and untested, except in marketing, it appears that the careful involvement of both the public and private sector in regional planning of sustainable tourism could be a highly desirable means of developing ecotourism in conjunction with more mass tourism simultaneously, with investment returns for government, protection built in for communities, and the potential of funding the conservation of natural resources on a destination scale. The experience of participants showed that regional planning is required to make sustainable tourism a genuine output of donor programs and that public private planning is likely to be the best tool to achieve this.

It was agreed that financing for ecotourism programs needs to be moved from NGOs to SMEs, and that SMEs should be given the tools to finance and help develop community based tourism. It was universally agreed that joint ventures between private sector businesses and communities is the best model for achieving viable community based tourism projects.

It was noted that businesses seeking to meet sustainable tourism development models will need assistance covering the additional costs of working with communities and developing the most environmentally sensitive business operations. One type of technical assistance recommended to assist business was the advance profiling of social, political and livelihood strategies in communities before enterprise development efforts are launched. It was also recommended that training programs offer on-the-scene, practical workshops, not classroom exercises.

Overall it was agreed that community based ecotourism development requires all the same approaches as other businesses, but that community involvement procedures make this process longer than standard business development. Frequently there is not enough time in a 3-year donor project to complete all the necessary phases of community-based enterprise development.

It is for this reason that private sector partners are required, but they must receive support to cover the costs of sharing all of their business planning, management, operations, and marketing tools. Stronger market based approaches that will attract business partners and reinforce supply chains, and bolster effective marketing through existing supply chains was recommended.

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It was recommended that business alliances are considered as a cost effective means at the local level to achieve more effective marketing systems for ecotourism. It was recommended that donors help SMEs ally with their community partners in local, regional and international Internet marketing programs. These alliances will need support to build the capacity to handle bookings, customer service, web-site maintenance, and to ensure local quality control mechanisms of all their partners are working and in place.

Interpretive program development is a highly important component of ecotourism that must be taken into account as part of ecotourism enterprise development.

Ecotourism's triple bottom lines are well understood to be social, environmental and economic. To date donor's have largely sought to ensure these bottom lines are met by funding certification and best practice workshops. While there was no agreement on the value of certification in the marketplace, it was pointed out that millions of donor dollars have been spent on the question and that results indicate it takes over 10 years for investment in certification to result in more marketable programs. It was pointed out that given the shortage of funds for sustainable tourism development to date that other priorities, such as enterprise development strategies that are market-based, need to be given a higher priority in order to meet immediate local needs. Other triple bottom line development practices discussed, such as Corporate Social Responsibility reporting and Build, Operate and Transfer programs are in their infancies, but both appear to be promising tools which are at the experimental stage.

Finally, it was recommended that financial institutions make current information about sustainable tourism investments accessible to the public online on their websites. To their credit, many financial institutions do provide information such as basic details of projects in the pipeline. What is lacking are details such as request for proposals and project evaluations. In fact, the request for proposals may be issued through the backchannel (email) with a two week window. This information is either not present on the institutional websites or difficult to locate.

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Chatter and general introductions

Introductions

Megan Epler Wood

Location: Burlington, VT USA

Posted: Tue Oct 25, 2005 8:53 am

I have released a new EplerWood Report that I think is relevant to our discussions. I invite you to have a look. It is titled, *Stepping Up, Creating a Sustainable Tourism Enterprise Strategy that can Deliver in the Developing World*.

Please consider reading this before or during the forum. It discusses how small and medium business enterprise development in sustainable tourism is an important approach to delivering on efforts to create large scale solutions to poverty reduction and conservation of landscapes. It can be found at www.eplerwood.com/reports.php

Rod Bilz

Location: North Bay, Ontario, Canada

Posted: Fri Oct 28, 2005 2:32 pm Post subject: Introductions

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself before the forum starts next week. My name is Rod Bilz and I'm the vice president of FRi Ecological Services located in North Bay, Ontario, Canada. Our company has been involved in ecotourism and sustainable tourism development domestically and has just recently ventured into the international field.

I am really looking forward to meeting the participants and the dialogue that develops around the topics. I hope everyone has a good weekend and we'll talk next week.

Megan Epler Wood

Location: Burlington, VT USA

Posted: Mon Oct 31, 2005 4:41 pm

Hello fellow Emerging Industry Participants, I look forward to our first day tomorrow. I have compiled some statistics I hope you will all see. I have them in charts ready to post - will work with Ron on this. Here is a taste.

Of the 176 registered as of this evening, 7% are journalists, 40% are Active, and 53% are passive participants.

63% have never participated in an on-line conference before.

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Markets and Market Development received the highest importance rating from the group in the Topic ratings (4.1 out of 5).

In the Sub-topic ratings, Development with Communities received the highest rating (4.3 out of 5), Crosscultural Interactions was second (4.2), and Destination Marketing was third (4.1).

Will provide the full graphs as soon as possible!

Megan Epler Wood

Location: Burlington, VT USA

Posted: Mon Oct 31, 2005 4:47 pm

Hello, I have one more post this evening. I would like to draw your attention to the publication, *Ecologies; Exploring Opportunities for Sustainable Business*. and the other background research that was performed for this study. This is very good information to use for our dialogue. Ron has linked this publication to the reference area of our conference page.

It can be found directly at http://ifcln1.ifc.org/ifcext/enviro.nsf/Content/EBFP_Ecolodge

Aivar Ruukel

Location: Estonia

Posted: Tue Nov 01, 2005 10:59 am Post subject: Introduction

Hello everybody, I will also take opportunity to introduce myself. My name is Aivar Ruukel , I live and work in Soomaa National Park , Estonia. My company SOOMAA.COM organizes tours and provides travel services inside and nearby National Park. The backbone of our activities is a network of farms along the rivers and people living there. We do co-operate with many other local farms, accommodations, guides and service providers.

The philosophy of SOOMAA.COM is ecotourism, which means to us promoting local economic development, supporting preservation of cultural and natural heritage and educating travelers and public.

Beside business I am chairman of Estonian Ecotourism Asociacion. I am looking forward for interesting discussions.

Jascivan Carvalho

Location: Ecuador

Posted: Tue Nov 01, 2005 3:57 pm Post subject: Greetings from Ecuador

My name is Jascivan Carvalho and I represent an ecotourism operator here in Ecuador called Tropic Ecological Adventures.

TROPIC is an award-winning ecotourism company operating since 1994. We are specialized in providing high quality travel experiences in Ecuador's most spectacular natural areas in the company of its native peoples.

For us ecotourism denotes a set of principles that distinguish from traditional tourism. Unfortunately the term have become common parlance and sometimes misused; In contrast, we

believe is essential to re-affirm the concept of ecotourism and responsible travel, and that is why our policies are focused in:

- Small scale, locally produced 'travel experiences'
- Experiences that gives 'clients insight' into regions, cultures and wildlife
- Experiences that support local communities and enterprises
- Experiences that aid the local environment and assist conservation of the regions, cultures and wildlife visited.

Via this forum we hope to share our experiences and learn from others. We expect that this initiative will provide new and better ideas on how making of our ecotourism operations more sustainable ones.

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Michelle Kirby and Andres Hammerman

Location: Chugchilan, Ecuador

Posted: Tue Nov 01, 2005 6:58 pm Post subject: Black Sheep Inn Ecuador

Greetings from Black Sheep Inn Ecolodge Ecuador; www.blacksheepinn.com.

We are a small, ecological guesthouse high in the rural Ecuadorian Andes. We've just been awarded the Smithsonian/Tourism Cares for Tomorrow Sustainable Tourism Award of 20 k! Best part of winning this award is that we are a small grassroots operation that is still totally affordable to everyone....backpackers, FITs, tourists and travelers from all over the world. We are not at all exclusive, which has increased our popularity. Black Sheep Inn guests walk away with a better understanding of sustainability, conservation, and ecotourism. We hope that this forum will offer insight to the 'big wigs' of how sustainable tourism can improve the industry...and help the planet. Life is not necessarily about labeling, but about sharing best practices: successes and failures. Learning from one another. We are happy to share all.

Jan Wigsten

Location: Sweden

Posted: Wed Nov 02, 2005 4:48 am Post subject: Intro

I look forward to the exchange of practical experiences. My name is Jan Wigsten and I am a co owner of Nomadic Journeys in Mongolia. We are - in bound tour operator with a network of 5 fully collapsible yurt camps - and we are well positioned in the supply chain and our challenge is

to accommodate growth in a very short summer season. I have been professionally involved in Mongolian tourism over a time period of more than 25 years, while NJ is 12 years old. In the winter time (off season like now) assisting in rural development and conservation work with WWF and Conservation International among others. When consulting it is always on the topic of either micro enterprise development in rural areas (diversification of livelihoods through tourism) and/or spatial planning of tourism in protected areas or visitation sites (public-private

partnerships planning, management plans, tourism zoning etc). As a practitioner I am interested to identify the "gaps" for sustainable development and provide guidance for appropriate interventions. I am also directly in the Swedish certification program Nature's Best. Now learning the ropes of how to navigate in this forum. I hope this posting ends up where it ought to be.

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Jamie Sweeting

Location: Washington D.C.

Posted: Wed Nov 02, 2005 7:58 am Post subject: Greetings from sunny Washington DC

My name is Jamie Sweeting. I work for Conservation International, where I am challenged daily to see how we can make tourism a vehicle for improved human welfare and conservation. We work at all levels of the tourism supply chain and with a whole variety of different stakeholders. Essentially I am here to participate in the dialogue and learn from the experiences and knowledge of others how I (and CI more generally) might be able to get better at what it is we try to do...

George Duffy

Location: Black Diamond, AB

Posted: Wed Nov 02, 2005 2:28 pm Post subject: Background

I co-own an outbound tour wholesale company in Canada with Alanna Dean (P.Eng) called Worldwide Ecolodges. We provide a link between international operators and lodges and the Canadian market by promoting tours and packages through travel agencies here in Canada. We publish an annual tour catalogue which shows a selection of product and prices to travel agents and their clients in a pleasing and hopefully persuasive format.

Without providing an exhaustive resume, both of us have been also been involved for many years in green building and infrastructure technology, ecological living concepts, public and private sector policy making in tourism entrepreneurship.

I hope that we can share some insights from our experiences and learn a lot from the combined wisdom of so many participants.

Brian Beall

Posted: Wed Nov 02, 2005 3:35 pm Post subject: Introductions

Greetings everyone. My name is Brian Beall and I am a research assistant for the Tourism Development Corps (TDC) division of Citizens Development Corps (CDC), located in Washington, DC. CDC is a non-profit organization that supports private sector development and economic growth in emerging and transitioning economies throughout the world by delivering practical strategies and solutions, high impact programs, and the expertise of experienced business professionals.

The TDC division is the result of a strategic partnership between The George Washington University's International Institute of Tourism Studies (IITS) and CDC. TDC assists individuals, businesses, regional and national governments, NGOs, and other stakeholders to take full advantage of the opportunities presented directly and indirectly by the tourism industry. All TDC work is done under the guidance of its vision of a world in which the unique capacity of the tourism industry is used as the driver for broad and equitable economic growth and opportunity.

It's a pleasure to meet everyone and I look forward to useful and insightful discussion throughout the forum.

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Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Thu Nov 03, 2005 2:00 am

Hello, everyone! I am Oliver Hillel, tourism consultant, just out of a 2 year assignment as Team Leader of a tourism development project in Northern Palawan, in the Philippines (see www.sempnp.com for more info). Now I am waiting for my next challenge in this awesome destination of around 500 coral islands, while evaluating all the things I've learned. For me, it was refreshing to see sustainable tourism from a ground perspective under pressure for results. All I can say is that the life of a consultant is quite different from that of an Inter-governmental officer or an NGO program director...

As moderator of the topic on the Infrastructure needs for ecotourism, I wanted to ask participants to reflect on this relevant topic, and shamelessly ask you to check this topic out, post provocative opinions, share the lessons you learned, ask questions, etc - just don't let the opportunity pass to make it lively!!

Emilio Kifuri

Location: Texas and Chihuahua

Posted: Thu Nov 03, 2005 2:17 pm

Saludos Conference Participants, I am Emilio Kifuri, president of Canyon Travel, an in bound Copper Canyon, Mexico tour operator, an ecolodge developer and operator and a railcar operator.

<http://canyontravel.com>

I have been professionally involved in Mexico tourism for 34 years. My company has developed small remote lodges in partnership with local communities and with local families. I have also been involved with conservation, community development and environmental justice as a board member of the Sierra Madre Alliance. Recently I supported Liga International - The Flying Doctors of Mercy into extending continuing

medical services to the very poor in two communities in the Sierra Madre. I also have been a long time supporter of the Tarahumara Children's Hospital and in cooperation with Planeta.com, I am the underwriter for Mexico's Colibri Ecotourism Award.

I am an avid birder-hiker and my pet peeve, particularly with travel websites in the UK, is that Mexico is misclassified as being located in Central America. Often placed in Latin America, which is not a geographical term, and this ignorance about one of most biodiverse areas of the planet is not beneficial.

I look forward to learning and to sharing my experiences with all of you.

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Mary Finn

Location: US & Ecuador

Posted: Fri Nov 04, 2005 8:00 am Post subject: Introductions

Good morning, all, and many thanks to Ron, Megan and the others who helped bring together another intriguing online ecotourism conference.

My name is Mary Finn, and I have had the pleasure of participating in many of Ron's conferences on Planeta over the years. I have worked in ecotourism - including working from within a small rural community in Ecuador to help 'bootstrap' their ecotourism operation (www.santa-lucia.org). I consider one of my biggest 'coups' to have been getting Ron Mader to visit our small operation after his presentation to a major Ecotourism conference in Quito a few years back (the other place he visited was that of our friends Andres and Michelle at the award-winning Black Sheep Inn). I also participated, along with Ron, BSI, Casa Mojanda and others in the development of a white paper on Ecotourism for Ecuador, and was a participant in the formation Ecuadorian ecotourism network, EcuadorVerde.

I've worked in green building, as well as in consulting, education, and most recently, as Executive Director of a community-based non profit working with Latino and other immigrant communities in the suburban Chicago area. While currently not actively involved in ecotourism, I remain interested in the potential for ecotourism as at least one tool in sustainable community development both in the US and internationally. And I'm particularly interested to hear shared stories of both successes and 'challenges' (or 'lessons learned') from others in this conference.

Thanks again, and I look forward to the next couple of weeks!

Antonio Suarez

Location: MEXICO

Posted: Mon Nov 07, 2005 10:01 am Post subject: About Balam

My name is Antonio Suarez from Balam a consultancy group based at Mexico with 13 years of experience developing nature tourism projects mostly around cities three are the areas we mostly work on:

1. Infrastructure development and building, our main two products are the “tent cabin ecolodging” with more than 100 sold and install at national parks and dry toilets.
2. Training for ecotourism success around community integration and Balam's yearly international program on multi use trail building and cycle path design where an average of 120 people from different sectors learn the basic on how to start on non motorized recreation and mobility.
3. Architectural project development for landscape and sustainable management.

We mostly work on mountain ecosystems
To see more about Balam:

<http://www.planeta.com/ecotravel/mexico/balam/balam.html>
http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2001/09/0905_mexicoecotourism.html
<http://www.balam.org.mx>

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Rick MacLeod Farley

Location: Canada

Posted: Mon Nov 07, 2005 3:29 pm Post subject: Greetings from Northern Canada!

Hello one and all! My name is Rick MacLeod Farley. My consulting firm, MacLeod Farley and Associates, focuses on ecotourism development, heritage tourism and community economic development.

I am looking forward to some great forum discussions! There is certainly a great need, in Canada and internationally, for us to figure out how to make ecotourism happen more widely and more effectively.

I've been working for the last fifteen years on ecotourism with Aboriginal communities in Northern Canada -- and while the community capacity to develop ecotourism is increasing dramatically, there is little or no indication of increased capacity within the Canadian development agencies.

There are bright lights in the development agency systems, but the systems are not bright lights! The bright lights are those individuals bureaucrats who manage to overcome the significant internal obstacles to make their agencies work. I would greatly appreciate some dialogue centred on finding ways to make the development agency systems more effective - and would love to learn of development agencies that are worthy role models that others can learn from.

From 1995 through 2000, I was extensively involved with MoCreebec Council of the Cree Nation, and their efforts to establish the Cree Village Ecolodge which opened in 2000. Cree Village has won a bunch of awards for their facility and approach, including a Canadian national tourism award last month. They are on the web at www.creevillage.com.

Our consulting firm is a member of The International Ecotourism Society. I've been a guest instructor with past Ecodge Planning and Development Workshops, including the session at the World Ecotourism Summit in Quebec City in May 2002. I've also developed and taught Aboriginal Ecotourism Development workshops.

Current projects in development include Wa-sh-ow James Bay Wilderness Centre for Moose Cree First Nation in Ontario, and Kamestatin Lodge for the Innu in Labrador.

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Jeremy Garrett

Location: Vermont, USA

Posted: Tue Nov 08, 2005 7:10 am Post subject: Jeremy Garrett Introduction

Jeremy Garrett, Principal, NaTour Communications (www.natour.us)

I've only been involved "officially" in ecotourism for the past 5 years, first serving as Membership Director for The International Ecotourism Society under Megan Epler Wood, and then developing my own consultancy (NaTour Communications) three years ago to specialize in the development, promotion and marketing of sustainable tourism products and destinations. However, I've worked in the outdoor "arena" for the past 15 years.

I think "ecotourism" is too limiting for what we're all involved in, as true ecotourism encompasses active/adventure tourism, community tourism, nature tourism, heritage/historical tourism, etc. And to be honest, these are all the same travelers anyway, by and large. I think that if we can instead strive to make all tourism sustainable (regardless of the niche or mass-market), then we'll be light years ahead...

Carol Patterson

Location: Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Posted: Tue Nov 08, 2005 8:43 am Post subject: Introductions

Hi Everyone. I'm Carol Patterson. I've been an ecotourism consultant for 15 years and have seen a lot of changes in the industry in that time. My company Kalahari Management focuses on business development, feasibility studies and tourism assessments. Much of my work has been with destinations wanting to develop their nature tourism potential after extractive industries have been exhausted.

I'm also a writer and some of you have probably come across my book *The Business of Ecotourism* or the Teacher's Edition of the same title. I've recently finished another book with Albert Teo of Borneo EcoTours, *Saving Paradise: The Story of Sukau Rainforest Lodge*, which is a great case study on ecotourism best practices. You can find more on these books or our free quarterly newsletter at <http://www.kalahari-online.com>.

Thanks to Ron and Megan for organizing this great discussion on sustainable tourism concepts!

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Megan Epler Wood

Location: Burlington, VT USA

Posted: Wed Nov 09, 2005 4:13 pm

Hi everyone, Ron asked that we as organizers introduce ourselves. Better late than never?

I have been involved with ecotourism since 1989, when I produced a documentary for Turner Broadcasting and PBS in the U.S. as part of the *World of Audubon* series on ecotourism that looked at its development in Kenya, Belize and Montana. As a result of this documentary The International Ecotourism Society was born. I was its founder with a wonderful board of directors from around the world. We had our first board meeting in 1991 in which we coined the most often used definition of ecotourism - responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well being of local people. I was its executive director and then president until 2002. In that time period we addressed questions of international ecotourism standards, community based ecotourism, protected area fees for conservation and private sector contribution to conservation, and donor policies among many issues.

I began a consulting business in 2003. My firm specializes in designing projects with development agency support that are market-based and stress the use of private sector business principles, while stressing analysis of environmental and social impacts and community needs at every phase of development. I have worked with consultants in many countries on a team basis and have seen some exciting results thanks to very synergistic team work. We have worked for USAID, the World Bank/IFC, some private sector clients, and most recently Harvard University.

I am always researching and learning and have been publishing alot lately. You can see my reports at www.eplerwood.com.

Ron Mader

Location: Oaxaca, Mexico

Posted: Thu Nov 10, 2005 4:43 am Post subject: Intro

Greetings, all. My name is Ron Mader and I'm one of the co-organizers of the Ecotourism Emerging Industry Forum.

My apologies for making a late introduction. I always intend to post an intro quickly and then day-to-day (or hour-to-hour) chores of moderating a dialogue of this caliber consumes my time as I rationalize that you already know me!

That said, I'll tell you something about my work and interest in this topic.

Having completed one of the first masters degree with a focus on ecotourism back in 1990, I knew that 'ecotourism' tapped a growing interest among travelers and locals and everyone in

between. That said, I'm not suggesting we have an easy task. As Pogo said, we are surrounded by insurmountable opportunity.

For the past ten years I've hosted Planeta.com as a communication hub for those working toward ecotourism and sustainable development. It was the Web's first site that gave serious reflection on ecotourism, and while it's pleasing to be the 'first' at something, it pays to remember the warning that pioneers get scalped.

Many of you I had the pleasure of meeting at the Quebec Ecotourism Summit. I had the pleasure of presenting a report from an online conference conducted just two months before.

<http://www.planeta.com/2002ecotourism.html>

Some of you may know of my work with Transitions Abroad magazine. I am their editor for 'ecotourism' and 'Latin America.' I am very pleased to announce that the November/December issue just hit the stands and it includes my resource list of ecotourism information sources. In March 2006 I am collaborating with Transitions Abroad and Indigenous Tourism Rights International (my friend Deborah McLaren) in presenting a 1-day Responsible Tourism Forum in Baltimore

<http://www.planeta.com/events.html>

I have high expectations for this conference as it has been a delight to develop. Working with Megan has been a rewarding collaborative experience. Likewise, dialogues with the SMEs during the planning stage helped define the topics. To everyone who offered input over the past 18 months, thanks!

Part of my desire to conduct this forum was due to numerous conversations with entrepreneurs of leading ecotourism lodges and businesses. They complained that their voices were not heard. Some of these operators are featured in this conference. Others who I will reference have gone out of business ... or found work as consultants!

What I would like to see as an outcome of this forum is a frank assessment of where ecotourism stands today and how we might collaborate in 2006.

Thank you all for your participation and I look forward to meeting you in the natural world.

Kind regards

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Paul Radchenko

Location: Medicine Hat, Alberta

Posted: Thu Nov 10, 2005 2:40 pm

Hello to all Participants and Moderators, My apologies also for such a late start. First of all I would like to thank Ron and Megan for organizing this conference and their continued passion for ecotourism.

My name is Paul Radchenko and I am the Coordinator of the Ecotourism and Outdoor Leadership - Bachelor of Applied Science - Degree Program at Medicine Hat College. We are located in sunny SE Alberta, Canada.

I think this is a great opportunity for our future industry leaders to get a number of perspectives on the application of the ecotourism industry in all its diversity.

This is the second time we have been able to participate in such dialogue as last year our students (now alumni) were able to get a sense of what Urban Ecotourism is how it has evolved throughout the world.

Our current 4th year students are viewing the conference pages as part of their Directed Studies course. Some of the topics up for discussion form the basis of their course Project and your discussion and expertise will no doubt help them understand the industry better.

Many of them have expressed interest in becoming entrepreneurs in the industry and this conference will give them an assessment of where ecotourism stands today and how they might be involved in the future. I look forward to the continued discussion.

Bill Tuffin

Location: Luang Namtha, Laos

Posted: Thu Nov 10, 2005 11:19 pm Post subject: Greetings from Laos!

Dear Friends, I am joining the forum a bit late. My colleagues in Laos are working too hard to be able to participate. Paul Rogers from SNV was generous to request that I be allowed to participate in the forum. I am very grateful for that. However, I am not sure to what degree that I will be able to participate. This is the beginning of our high season. We are practitioners so this means that this is the season when we need to out in the field. Add to this our limited access to the internet. Well, I guess I just not sure how much we be able to participate.

But I would like to take this opportunity not only to introduce myself but also to tell you of some of the very innovative and exciting things that are happening in Laos.

First of all, my name is Bill Tuffin. Together with a local family we operate the Boat Landing Guest House (www.theboatlanding.com). You can also read in detail about what we are doing from an interview that I wrote earlier this year for Ecoclub (www.ecoclub.com/news/068/interview.html). This year we have entered into a partnership with a Lao tour operator, Green Discovery; the owner of Green Discovery, Inthy, wants to move his business more in the direction of ecotourism and community-based tourism (www.greendiscoverylaos.com) making it the ideal company for us to partner with. This will provide us with a tremendous opportunity to show that the private sector has a major role to play and that it can be done in a responsible sensitive way.

Tourism in Laos is developing in a unique way. The country does not have the infrastructure of its neighbors nor very many large cultural sites to draw tourists. Added to this, Laos is just now emerging on the tourism scene after years of war and isolation.

What Laos does offer is an unspoiled rural lifestyle, mountains, a large protected area system, forests and ethnic diversity. In this context of little developed tourism with the added boost of emerging market trends in ecotourism and with the recognition of donors that tourism has a role to play in rural development, some very interesting and innovative initiatives in the development of ecotourism are emerging. In Laos the private sector, the donors, and the government have been working on the development of ecotourism from the outset. With tourism in Laos still in its infancy, this presents an opportunity to develop tourism from the bottom up in way away that learns from the lessons of others. We hope that it means that Laos will avoid many of the negative impacts that have affected other countries.

The Lao National Tourism Administration in collaboration with the ADB and the private has developed a website to show case some of these initiatives: www.ecotourismlaos.com

I regret that we here in Laos may not be able to participate in this forum to the fullest extent that we would like to. But know that we are surely working hard on many of the same issues that the rest of you are and perhaps when this high season is over we will come up for a breath of air. I will try to pop in as much as possible before this conference has finished.

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Developing Infrastructure for Sustainable Tourism

MODERATOR: Oliver Hillel

TOPIC:

1. Rural infrastructure, transportation systems, sewage, water, and energy issues

Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Wed Nov 02, 2005 4:51 am Post subject:

Hello, I am Oliver Hillel, tourism consultant from Puerto Princesa, Philippines. For the past 2 years, I've been the team leader of a sustainable tourism project for Northern Palawan, a beautiful destination with around 500 islands (for more information, please see www.sempnp.com). One of the recurrent themes I have had to deal with is the need for infrastructure as a stepping stone for ecotourism development - and under this term, I'd like to stick to the larger kind of facilities normally taken up by local governments or development agencies, such as roads, ports and airports, water, power, telecommunications, etc.

Although many ecotourism facilities today can operate practically independent of public services (using their own generators or solar panels, water wells or desalinators, private airports and satellite dishes), the investment requirements of this option limit products to high-end markets close to significant originating countries. In my experience, this is due not only to the high overhead necessary to cover the costs, but also to the logistics for maintenance and technical assistance needs to keep these high-tech resorts running. This, in turn, limits conservation and social development benefits. Most often, these solutions are not feasible for the local SMEs

which are essential for ecotourism as a development option. This does not mean that these products are not sustainable or desirable - it just reduces the scope and political significance of ecotourism. For ecotourism to thrive and benefit parks on a larger scale, generate awareness of conservation needs and provide alternative livelihoods, local governments need to provide existing and potential investors with pretty much the same services than more traditional tourism destinations - don't you think so?

Some of the issues I'd like participants to share their experiences on include:

- Local governments in developing countries are normally unable to invest in all infrastructure needs upfront. Given today's technology, what are the minimal infrastructure needs local governments have to provide so that the private sector can start (or continue) investing? Which are the first bottlenecks they need to prioritize to attract investors to get established, or to expand their investments? For instance, nowadays private telecommunication companies can take care of secure Internet connections that allow travelers to pay with credit cards and use traveler's checks
- At the end of the day, for ecotourism development, maybe land lines are not necessary... On the other hand, solar energy is still not economically feasible unless there is a measure of subsidies or technical assistance provided, so power supply is essential. Not 24 hour maybe... Is 12-hour daily supply enough?
- Sometimes, creative solutions can avoid large investments. In Palawan, for instance, a regular 4-wheel drive bus system on regular dirt roads (and relatively well kept bridges) could allow tourism arrivals to duplicate, avoiding the need to build million-dollar concrete roads. Often, a 1,000m compacted gravel airstrip and a landing apron allows 50- or 70-seater planes to arrive, again without the need for a 1.5 km international-level concrete runway which takes many years to fundraise for. What simple solutions have you come up with in your struggle to overcome infrastructure deficiencies?
- **Investment in sustainable infrastructure** – that can be independent of public services – such as solar or wind often requires a high level of investment that many more remote ecolodges cannot afford as part of start-up costs. These costs are not only due to the high cost of purchasing this technology from distant sources, but the difficulty and cost of maintaining these technologies in remote areas. Only companies that serve high end clientele, or are very near to high technology centers, can feasibly afford to solar and wind technology because of the cost of importing and maintaining them, and the lack of skilled maintenance people to keep them operating.
- The question raised is what is the **minimum investment in infrastructure that government and donors can make**, particularly in rural areas, which will enable private investment in ecotourism more feasible?
- **Expensive road or air infrastructure is not always required and in fact can be counterproductive**, where the goal is low volume tourism development.

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Neel Inamdar

Posted: Thu Nov 03, 2005 1:03 pm Post subject: an example

One example is the Shompole example in Southern Kenya.

The NGO brokered a deal on behalf of the community with donor agencies and the private sector. The private sector put in the funds to build and operate the ecolodge (with a 10 year transfer), while international donors / foundations were approached to address infrastructure and conservation investments, as well as community organizational development / capacity. So the EU and USAID put in funds for roads for the conservation area, paid for patrol vehicles, radios etc, as well as an airstrip. The Ford Foundation put in funding for the organizational development and capacity building work. The NGO raised the funds for the lawyers to represent the community with the investor on a strong footing.

The community also had to put in equity, but it was structured in the form of natural resources - building materials etc.

The private sector investor had to build and operate the lodge - and was responsible for all the business costs, including all the solar; water; etc. It took over two years to negotiate!

Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Fri Nov 04, 2005 5:13 am

The point with Shompola, or with so many other good examples of eco-products and properties developed through partnerships (the International Finance Corporation (IFC) is innovating significantly in this regard, by giving grants for private sector partners to cover the "externalities" of being sustainable, such as with Inkaterra in Peru's Machu Picchu and El Nido Resorts in Palawan). On one hand, many donors are looking for a bigger bang for their buck than 20 or even 40 room resorts, however sustainable and successful it may be. Agencies are talking about conservation corridors rather than parks, landscape-level effects rather than demonstrative projects, and thousands of jobs/business opportunities generated. Governments need to think **destination level**, and are often reluctant to side with one or two investors or communities only - and governments are arguably the key stakeholder to provoke development banks and multilateral agencies.

Another element is that more and more agencies want considerable counterpart investment. In fact, a very common project architecture nowadays is to give out grants **CONDITIONAL** to the implementing agency finding about 50% of the collateral locally in order to disburse any funds. So, our challenge in infrastructure development for ecotourism has to include:

- Determine which are the critical infrastructure needs in the case of each destination.

For instance, small aircraft capacity can translate into larger and better equipped airports so 70-seaters can land where today only 19-seaters can. Just this change would allow tourism arrivals to grow around 100% (granted that here numbers are still low, around 25,000/year for each municipality)!!

In another one, it's water - often more tourists in the high season cannot be accommodated because there's not enough potable water.

- Get more agencies to assist in developing proposals. For infrastructure, one of the challenges is that it's costly and quite technically difficult to produce the Terms of Reference (TORs) for a project. Before you can approach a credit agency or donor, you need to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars just to carefully produce the requirements for an airport, water system or a road. Few agencies are willing to fund this first stage - one exception is **JBIC's** Special Assistance for Project Formation. Of course, consulting companies are very glad to come up with template, back-of-the-envelope proposals for free (prospecting their next bid), but this is simply not enough, and it's not done from the point of view of the destination's priorities.

- Engender creative ways to raise local funds to provoke the interest of donors/lenders. Here, we've tried suggesting to the private sector to create a "challenge fund", say of US\$10,000, specifically to demand matching funds from local politicians and Municipal Governments, which in turn can serve as initial collateral for donors. This fund is intended to stir political willingness and momentum as much as funds.

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Antonio Suarez

Location: MEXICO

Posted: Fri Nov 04, 2005 5:06 pm Post subject: Green infrastructure thinking and planning

Green infrastructure thinking and planning appears to be the future not only for ecotourism itself.

Long term sustainability where recreation as well as services, urban and rural landscape harmonize need another way of thinking and "building the green"

Infrastructure main problem is not financing but "direction"

What is infrastructure trying to accomplish for the long term?

How is infrastructure going to be part of the future needs?

Lets start thinking on regional and national schemes where corridors, green ways and green cities will link to hubs, crossing cities, regions and country's urban and rural parks, "solar panels and ecolodging come later"

Government officials usually think regional when planning infrastructure, the thing is they do not know how to do it green, and it gets worse when consultants continue to promote site specific conservation infrastructure which has proved to be less effective. It seems that linking infrastructure is becoming a key factor for planning and developing green corridors where ecotourism can happen, especially when we think about developing countries where most services infrastructure need to be directed to basic living services such as water supply, sewage

and waste management. Many of these are priorities which can easily become green infrastructure if planned on that direction.

Why can't we start thinking about ecological infrastructure when building roads and planning ahead for connections, services and demand?

It will be more cost effective to have a multifunctional not single purpose panorama when thinking about ecotourism infrastructure.

Green infrastructure systems will help to protect and restore natural ecosystems providing a frame work for future development including social and economic benefits related to cleaner air, water, education and health while connecting cities, creating corridors and giving populations a chance to approach nature on their daily life.

Trails and bicycle paths are some basic examples of green infrastructure for ecotourism, but lets also remember that in many cases all kinds of lodging including ecolodging infrastructure can represent real estate speculation and possible land conflict issues in developing countries.

As we teach the multiple trail building and green infrastructure school twice a year where local communities and officials assist we have discovered much more reception to regional infrastructure than just site project needs, we have seen the green infrastructure concept as a way that government investment can flow that is beneficial to more stakeholders, but is also beneficial to ecotourism development.

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George Duffy

Location: Black Diamond, AB

Posted: Sat Nov 05, 2005 5:04 pm

I agree fully with Antonio. We need to step back and take a look at the entire infrastructure lifecycle and future livability goals before employing the band aid solution of 1950's technology.

Standard solutions for moving people around work well for the standard beach tourist but ecotourism, by virtue of the goals it sets for itself, implies there are alternative and more environmentally friendly means of accomplishing the same goals. If we assume that the ultimate goal is to move and accommodate large numbers of people (this, in itself, is debatable since it implies that growth by quantity is more profitable than growth by quality but that's another conversation) then, as I see it, there are alternate, non-exclusive, methods of approach.

1. For all financing, ensure the technology remains locally controlled. For example, the assumption that standard power lines are the only alternative to solar systems does not remain true when measured by capital, maintenance and replacement costs. If solar requires technical expertise, then the cost of paying for one or two trained people in the area is considerably less than the cost of installing power lines, maintaining a centralized plant and replacing damaged wires and poles. If salaries and materials are cost shared among other ecotourism operators and

lodges, then expertise is brought into the local region. This expertise can be shared with the local residents which helps encourage more and better training and retains money in the local region, thereby stimulating the local economy. Buying groups help reduce the overall costs of any items that need to be imported. Shared experiences help reduce the number of problems associated with the systems. For more remote regions, what about a buy-in to a "roaming" technician? On a personal note, when visiting ecolodges we often see solar systems incorrectly installed in smaller operations, which increases the frustration with this technology. Sometimes, for the cost of \$10.00 or obtaining better information for using batteries, these frustrations can be avoided. Why pay more for power lines when the solution is affordable? Why invest in the old power line technology that will become obsolete in the near future?

2. Change the technology. Incorporate systems. If you absolutely must have a runway or road then try to ensure the system and materials are more sustainable. Ensure road construction incorporates at least stormwater containment. There are a number of products out there that enable storm water to be contained under roads, thereby reducing the problems associated with erosion and allowing slow infiltration back into the groundwater. Surface water is not then transported to a region it wouldn't have flowed to pre-development and risks of mud slides caused by roads is reduced. We can now build roads that permit grass to grow through the surface, allow stormwater to flow through, yet can take the load of a 747. These roads/airstrips are made from post-consumer materials and can be maintained by local labour using a shovel.

All roads should be designed to accommodate multi-modal traffic. Roads that don't accommodate bicycles and pedestrians in a safe manner are merely encouraging the use of the automobile.

Ensuring a clean water supply starts with ensuring you don't contaminate the water in the first place. Look at sewage treatment from a water purification perspective.

Any kind of financing should and must incorporate multiple infrastructure needs as though they were linked, rather than the present method of seeing these needs as disparate entities.

Alanna Dean, P.Eng.
Worldwide Ecolodges

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Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Sun Nov 06, 2005 5:57 am

Speaking from the point of view of Palawan, Philippines (a bit like the Brazilian Amazon), let's face it - the kind of systems thinking Alanna would like to see is difficult to see... Also, the regional integrated planning proposed by Antonio, however much we'd like to see it happen, just does not - at least not yet. Frankly, in a time horizon of 5-10 years, you're just going to get very frustrated and bitter if you think it will. From my experience, with a few exceptions where naturally illuminated leaders have produced islands of relative excellence (Puerto Princesa is one

of them), most developing destinations will have a hard time trying to implement these ideas. Let me list why I think so, so that maybe a few solutions might come up.

1) Local governments do not have any resources. I mean REALLY no resources - in my region, Municipal Governments often have around US\$ 3-5,000 per year for investment in all and sundry, and Provincial Governments have US\$ 4,000 per year for tourism - training, planning and the whole nine yards. People are talking about decentralization and tax reform in many places, but it still hasn't happened because central government does not want to give up control of the budget. No local resources means no local solutions or management, end of story...

2) Therefore, money for infrastructure will most often come from development banks and agencies, and has to be raised through a combination of consultant's interests (they format the proposals), "donor cultivation" (knowing which agency is open to what kind of proposal), analysis of available funding pipelines (for instance, in Palawan they wanted a road but the bank only had an environmental portfolio open, so we had ourselves an "environmentally sustainable road" - and we did just this). The number of agencies involved (and their organizational culture) and the architecture of the loan tend to have a big influence on the end result - as much so, or maybe more, than the long-term planning needs of a broad spectrum of stakeholders, like we'd like to see happen.

One of the consequences of this, for instance, is scale. Smaller, more local infrastructure solutions are often not interesting for banks/donors - building, say, 8 or 9 small hydropower dams is so much more complicated than a bigger, Three-Gorge Dam of the kind built in China, and project management so much more demanding, that you'll have a hard time trying to raise funds for it.

3) Political decisions (including those of the infrastructure project proponents and the donors, of course) are not taken normally from an integrated long-term perspective, but respond to shorter term and personal circumstances. In young democracies, those who get elected often got their fame and fortune in extractive industries (i.e. fishing, slash-and-burn, cattle raising) or land speculation, and react to what they learned and what they can achieve in their term. One of the arts any project leader has to learn is how to dance on a line precariously balanced between those various political interests, needs and expectations, while still trying to achieve the lofty project goals of sustainability.

4) One last difficulty is that the most environmentally sustainable technologies (or those tourists expect and accept) still aren't available in developing destinations. In pioneer outposts, what you get is the same old destructive technologies - even more wasteful than in bigger cities. Here in Palawan, for instance, in relatively urban areas the thermoelectric power grid is just sooo much cheaper, the technology is fully local, that only a few foreigners have solar (by the way, in the tropics the biggest need is refrigeration, and this you still cannot do with solar economically - you can heat up water and you can light up areas, but no freezers and air conditioning). The amazing cutting edge sustainable utilities of Maho Bay cannot be put in place in most of Africa or Southeast Asia because suppliers are not yet there. It's another catch 22 - locals certainly have sustainable solutions - in Palawan, most toilets don't use running water (you use a pail and a water-filled bucket to flush it), use only fans to stir the humid air, low-watt fluorescent lighting and mosquito coils. But the first thing tourists ask for is running water, airconditioning, "nicer,

yellow lighting" and nets - better yet, no mosquitoes... They go to those resorts with these modern facilities - probably 60% of them in the hands of non-resident urbanites or foreigners...

Do you also find those limitations in your sites? How did you solve those problems in your cases?

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Michelle Kirby and Andres Hammerman

Location: Chugchilan, Ecuador

Posted: Sun Nov 06, 2005 8:07 pm Post subject: Infrastructure

In reference to our moderator, Oliver Hillel asking "What is the minimum infrastructure needed for ecotourism projects?" and the ensuing discussion we can give the example of Black Sheep Inn Ecuador (BSI).

We started the BSI in 1995 knowing that we needed a minimum infrastructure of good beds, good showers, and good food. We started with inexpensive prices (less than \$10 per day per person) in order to gain recognition and clientele. BSI currently charges between \$20 - \$40 per person night, yet we are still using the same high quality mattresses (best foam available in Ecuador), the same hot water heaters in shared shower facilities and we serve family style gourmet vegetarian food. We still, to this day, do not have private bathrooms.

When we moved to Chugchilan in 1994 there was no phone service. The nearest gas station, bank and post office were over 3 hours away. We did on the other hand have electricity and more importantly water. Chugchilan was serviced by 1 bus a day.

This simple infrastructure was sufficient to build a tourist destination and permanently change the economy of the rural village of Chugchilan. Ecological practices in both management and design can be inexpensive and make any new destination sustainable.

Arnaldo Rodriguez* of Green Consulting Ecuador (www.green-consulting.com) visited Chugchilan as a part of an inspection for the WTTC 2005 Tourism for Tomorrow Awards. He wrote: "Community-based ecotourism projects in Ecuador (and in several countries of Latin America) have failed because the initiatives did not start in the communities, but were created by NGOs or development agencies, which normally lack experience in tourism management. These initiatives focused their efforts in building the needed infrastructure and then left the community on its own, without any further training. In Chugchilán the model has been different, because locals have had the opportunity to learn from Black Sheep Inn's experiences, have developed products very well designed for the target client, and most importantly have learned from first-hand experiences how to provide a good service. I have been involved in community-based tourism for several years and Mama Hilda and Cloud Forest (the other Hostels that have opened in Chugchilan) are amongst the best locally owned lodges in Ecuador, both in terms of infrastructure and service."

We have followed a grassroots model based on good beds, good showers and good food. The reputation of the BSI has continued to bring us more clients, without which we could have never afforded to improve our infrastructure. Infrastructure is not something that can successfully be implemented at start up. The infrastructure should always change due to the changing dynamics of the project. As the project grows so should the infrastructure. In starting up the Black Sheep Inn ten years ago; good food, good beds, and good showers were the key to success as BSI was born. Today, good managers are needed infrastructure at BSI in order to ensure a sustainable future.

Ecotourism should not really be anything separate than good environmental and conservationist policy throughout any society. Why should ecotourism be a separate industry, or the Black Sheep of the tourism industry? We built an ecolodge because we care for and respect our surroundings, both the natural environment and the local community.

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Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Mon Nov 07, 2005 12:00 am

Thanks for the excellent example of Black Sheep Inn, a recipient of various awards for sustainability and community participation. From what I can read, your infra started basically with a road, water and electricity, and you built up the rest. What about protected areas - do your products include any natural attraction with any kind of official protection?

Linking the example of BSI again with Antonio's and Alanna's valuable guidelines of integration and wider sustainability planning, the challenge of BSI may still be scale. Even with a good business going, the number of jobs and business opportunities, as well as the amount of resources produced for effective conservation, is probably still limited. For optimal results, would Chugchilan not need to have a critical mass of ecotourism players large enough to make Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) feasible, and to stimulate Public-Private Partnerships which in turn raise the profile (and influence) of the industry with government and politicians, so that favorable policies and investments can make it fully sustainable?

It's clear that ecotourism should never be the only source of revenues or the main economic option, but if it's to be taken seriously enough for donors to consider it as part of a development strategy, it has to mature beyond the pioneers, however great a job they do. Often, pioneers like BSI get frustrated with the little infrastructure and investment promotion support they get from local and regional governments - and often this is due to the still limited scale of ecotourism.

I would be very much interested in BSI's view on larger-scale planning in Chugchilan - which would be the key factors to leverage benefits from ecotourism to the destination?

Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Mon Nov 07, 2005 12:29 am

We started with Neel's example of Shompola in Kenya, where the private sector, NGOs and government partnered with communities to generate a winning product with a BOT system. Infrastructure, in this case, was a public investment matching efforts from communities and operators.

I pointed out that larger scale tourism would be key to make social and environmental benefits relevant, raised the need for local funding counterparts and asked what critical infrastructure is needed for sustainable tourism/ecotourism.

Antonio asked us to consider infrastructure from a wider "user's" point of view - the type and amount of infrastructure required should be related to the direction the community wants to go. Ecolodges and ecotourism cannot be separated from overall sustainability at a regional level (nor can it shoulder the responsibility alone...). Therefore, ecotourism cannot be considered alone - we need sustainable cities, linked to rural areas and eco-destinations. Building green is a regional issue, and planning at this scale is essential. Alanna contributed the idea that systems thinking should be the basis for infrastructure planning (encouraging donors to consider multi-infrastructure planning and not isolated needs), and she pointed out that locally controlled technology is needed in relation to infrastructure and utilities. She gave a good example of how road development cannot be separated from the infrastructure requirements for maintenance of the road, such as erosion control. I then shared my concerns on limitations experienced in the field (in this case in the Philippines, but the situation is arguably similar in many other developing destinations) on how much these concepts can be applied, and asked for suggestions on how to overcome them.

Andres and Michelle of Black Sheep Inn shared how they developed this award-winning product with basic infrastructure (access through a road with a bus a week, water and electricity) and by involving communities and thinking destination-wide. I ended up by asking them to consider destination-level next steps in terms of infrastructure needs for sustainable tourism development..

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Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Tue Nov 08, 2005 2:10 am

When planning a destination, historically, infrastructure needs seem to come before investment. I remember an official of the Brazilian state government of Bahia, closely linked to several large Interamerican Development Bank (IADB) projects in the Northeast, telling me that "we need to overbuild a bit, create some pollution and deterioration, so that we can approach agencies for larger infrastructure investments". Perversely, this also applies to accommodations: very often, pressure for better airports and access, better waste and water management and power supply comes after overbuilding.

Ideally it should be different, of course. Regional and local players and governments should prepare for possible overdevelopment before it happens, and one of the ways to do it is to set up

appropriate infrastructure (not only for tourism). I'd love to hear more stories on what stage in this equation some of our participants are.

Ron Mader

Location: Oaxaca, Mexico

Posted: Fri Nov 11, 2005 7:47 am Post subject: Southern Queensland Wildlife Trail

As a reference for the Developing Infrastructure and Marketing, consult the Southern Queensland Wildlife Trail topic

<http://forum.planeta.com/viewtopic.php?t=409>

A co-operative venture between 20 operators in the region, the Southern Queensland Wildlife Trail showcases wildlife tourism experiences easily reached from major cities in the region. Wildlife Tourism Australia produced a map and website.

REFERENCE

Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Islands

<http://forum.planeta.com/viewforum.php?f=6>

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Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Sun Nov 13, 2005 5:23 am

As the third week of our e-Forum starts, I would like to call upon our participants to share more of your views and experiences on this essential topic ("Developing Infrastructure for Sustainable Tourism"), which as we know "makes or breaks a destination". Maybe our current participants do not have direct experience in this field (or feel that they can do only so much about it), but to me it remains one of the core concerns of any player in ecotourism, especially those who have to create the business environment for ecotourism - local governments, development agencies and donors. To stimulate discussion, I simply did a google on the keywords "ecotourism + infrastructure", and came up with interesting results:

- The KwaZulu-Natal Nature Conservation Board recognizes that "successful ecotourism development is dependent on the provision of infrastructure and essential support services by the State"; and asks "the relevant authorities to bring in infrastructure and essential support services, including roads, telecommunications, international and domestic airports, tourism marketing, and safety and security measures" - www.kznwildlife.com/Pol_Ecotourism.htm.

- An interesting article on using GIS technology in ecotourism planning in India brings up how important it is to have decent maps (with ground truthing and all tourism-related geographical elements clearly pinned) to adequately plan for sustainable tourism and infrastructure development. Producing those maps was around 35% of my project here in the Philippines. Now

we have to make sure they are used...(www.gisdevelopment.net/application/miscellaneous/misc028pf.htm, the article is called "Remote Sensing and GIS based ecotourism planning: A case study for western Midnapore, West Bengal, India").

- Finally, a EU-funded program called META (Marine Ecotourism in the Atlantic Area) raises the interesting point that often the right kind of ecotourism planning actually re-uses existing infrastructure rather than developing new ones - in this case, less-used resorts. www.tourism-research.org/metalessons.html. But the same principle can (and did) apply to schools being "reengineered" to become trail inns in Madagascar, exhausted mining craters becoming attractions in Curitiba, Brazil (a glass theater was built in a rocky depression close to town), and the famous "Faded Eldorado" Madeira-Mamore railway in the Amazon, mostly gone back to jungle, having part of its rail converted to a short excursion to see the jungle.

Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Tue Nov 15, 2005 6:11 am

My excuses for not having yet posted the weekly summary, my duty as a moderator - I'm in the middle of a consultancy in Laos. Will do so within the week!

I received a note from a long-time friend, Jerry A-Kum from Suriname, worked with METS, a tour and hotel operator, and in various positions in tourism and communications in the Caribbean. Here is Jerry's note:

"I believe that developing infrastructure for tourism should be stimulated at the community level. Too often tour operators and other tourism businesses claim to be ecotourism entities, whilst they do not really include local communities. In other words, I think local government should facilitate the process whereby people from local communities are encouraged to start their own business. If a community has members that are boat operators they could be offered training in how to set up a business (collective approach), how to manage the service (financial operations), how to guarantee high level services (standard operating procedures), as well as basic marketing/promotion skills. They should also be given tools in how to make a contribution to the well-being of their village and for instance loans with a low interest rate. After all villagers would love to see some benefits from tourism activities. Once the local business has been set up and operational they of course need to link up with inbound tour operators that are often located in town. These joint operations will benefit the responsible tourism tremendously- he or she will know that traveling with tour operator X that works together with boat operator Y from community Z, will benefit people at the grass root level. In other words, that is a wonderful tool of tackling poverty."

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Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Tue Nov 15, 2005 6:21 am

From the point of view of business-led ecotourism development, what specific recommendations would you offer those agencies responsible for the scale of investment necessary to address infrastructure needs, i.e. development banks, government agencies and other multi- or bilateral donors? What do they need to know from you to do better the next time around?

Rick MacLeod Farley

Location: Canada

Posted: Tue Nov 15, 2005 9:40 am Post subject: infrastructure aspects of two Canadian projects

Some quick notes here on how infrastructure has played into two Aboriginal ecotourism projects that I'm involved with as a project development consultant here in Ontario, Canada.

Cree Village Ecolodge was designed and developed by MoCreebec Council in Moose Factory, Ontario, Canada starting in 1995. It opened in July 2000. This lodge is located on an island with a population of about 2,000.

Cree Village Ecolodge was built on a pre-developed site (on the water, catching gorgeous sunsets!) and thus was already served by hydro, roads, sewage, etc. Nevertheless, the community leadership was determined to have this project reflect their traditions of 'living gently on the land'. They did hook up to the electrical grid, with a propane generator for emergency back-up. However, they also began pursuing opportunities to become a hydrogen power test site. Cree Village Ecolodge did hook up to the sewage system after reviewing a range of options, but opted for a mix of low-flush toilets and composting toilets. They wanted more composting toilets, but this would have required additional basement construction which they ended up deciding against due to environmental impact and finances.

Given Cree Village Ecolodge's proximity to existing infrastructure, there were some great debates about the merits of hooking up (in various ways) to the standard systems, as opposed to developing their own 'green' systems. It will be interesting to see how Cree Village evolves over time in this regard!

Wa-sh-ow James Bay Wilderness is under construction at a location 75 km east of Cree Village Ecolodge. This is a project by Moose Cree First Nation that has been in development for some time.

"Under construction" perhaps sounds more promising than it should! The central lodge and staff quarters 'shell' has been constructed for some time now. Final construction plans and final funding submissions have been in place since the fall of 2003. Now the project is 'hung up', while the funding agencies involved (3 domestic agencies - 2 federal and 1 provincial) wait for each other to make the first move. The main delay is a federal agency whose program budget changed after the submission, and after their recommendation for funding, but before they formally approved the project. Latest news is that the political will is there to support the project, but no apparent administrative movement yet. The Moose Cree First Nation community is continuing to pressure and fight for support.

In terms of infrastructure, Wa-sh-ow is located at a remote site, and all infrastructure requirements (power, sewage, water) have to be provided by the project. Drinking water has been a challenge - the initial intention was to sink a well, but all the well test sites revealed salinity in the ground water as the site is on a tidal river 10 km from James Bay! The final health unit approved proposed system will draw and treat water from a surface creek.

Treating water is a major pre-occupation for the government funding agencies who are very nervous about tainted water. In fact, the water concern arose post the 'Walkerton Tragedy' here in Ontario - where a municipal treatment plan was not operated correctly leading to e-coli deaths and sickness. Since then, the water treatment regime has been tightened up considerably, and this has added significant capital costs to remote ecotourism projects.

Electrical power for Wa-sh-ow will come from a hybrid system - wind mainly, with limited solar and a back-up propane generator. Hot water will come from a roof-top hot water solar system (your "best bang for your buck" in alternative energy!), with some back-up instant propane water heaters.

Wa-sh-ow space heating will come from clean-burning wood stoves. At one point Wa-sh-ow was looking at "Wood Gasifier" boiler technology - this is fascinating technology (very, very clean burning) but was finally ruled out to avoid distributing hot water for space heating given the sub-arctic location.

Building the infrastructure costs into the Wa-sh-ow capital costs has certainly increased the budget significantly. The increased water treatment requirements in Ontario has further increased capital costs.

For Wa-sh-ow, and for Moose Cree First Nation, it is clear that government has increased the requirements, and thus the costs, for water treatment infrastructure. What is not clear yet is whether the political will is there to provide the needed funding to enable this deserving First Nation's project to proceed.

Hope to see you all at Cree Village Ecolodge soon, and I further hope that we'll be able to jump into a freighter canoe together and catch a ride out to the completed and fully operational Wa-sh-ow James Wilderness Centre! All for now!

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Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Tue Nov 15, 2005 9:22 pm

Thanks, Rick, for your very relevant examples. Two points your examples brought up:

- When talking about sustainable technology in infrastructure, there's always the question of how many “alternative” solutions are really suitable for your customers: composting toilets are often perceived as less hygienic (although my father-in-law, a hydraulic and sanitary engineer, assures me that the exact opposite is true). Some tourists want real air conditioning rather than fans (and are willing to pay more for it), and cringe when told that grey water is used to flush toilets...

- A problem raised in Wa-sh-ow is the absence of potable water, a common problem in islands and close to shore where wells turn out to be brackish or ferrous. I think that desalination, a common alternative, is arguably one of the most unsustainable technologies ever – costs a fortune installing and maintaining, huge amounts of energy are needed (mostly from diesel), the hot hypersaline water spewing out kills everything in sight. Yet it's used quite often – any other alternative you are aware of other than gallons of freshwater being brought in? Have any of you used rainwater tanks?

Finally, I wanted to refer you to two good UNEP publications about sustainable resource use - Renewable Energy Opportunities in the Tourism Industry (2003) and A Manual for Water and Waste Management: What the Tourism Industry Can Do to Improve Its Performance (2003). In both cases, there was an effort to adapt content and case studies to SMEs often in remote areas. The Environmental Action Pack for Hotels (1995) still contains excellent tips for SMEs to manage resource use. Do have a look at UNEP's publications on sustainable tourism (<http://www.unep.fr/pc/tourism/library/home.htm>) - there are some other very good titles.

Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Tue Nov 15, 2005 9:24 pm

In our second (and part of the third) week, we began with my note that it's difficult to define at which precise moment should a public agency invest: if they respond to existing (over)demand only, you allow the damage of a period of overdevelopment and environmental deterioration (and this is the most common occurrence). On the other hand, if you develop infrastructure based on expected future demand, planning too far ahead (and particularly being overoptimistic), there's the risk of overbuilding the infrastructure beyond the actual future development level, making the investment unfeasible and costly to local taxpayers.

Ron then brought up the issue that developing trails, whose facilities also are a public infrastructure, can be a good way to distribute benefits and support sustainable tourism, with examples in Northern Laos and the Southern Queensland Wildlife Trail. I posted some references on the need for adequate mapping for infra planning based on an example from India, and on the use of existing infrastructure re-engineered for ecotourism, with examples from EU's META project which proposes eco-renovation of existing accommodation along Europe's Atlantic coast, unused school buildings as “gites d'etappe” for trails in Madagascar and tourism railways in Brazil. Jerry A-Kum of Suriname reminded us that infrastructure also includes the actual tourism facilities (hotels), so that this topic should consider both public and private sustainable investment promotion for infrastructure.

Finally, Rick McLeod gave us some very good examples of how two projects with indigenous communities in Canada dealt with infra needs, to which I posted some comments (and offered some UNEP publications as references on sustainable resource use):

- the Cree Village Ecolodge where construction caused some productive discussion in the community about traditional sustainable technology versus linking to available “normal” utilities – balancing what they wanted visitors to experience and learn about against the lesser cost of linking to “the grid” – a compromise was reached, but Rick indicates that there might still be changes.

- Wa-sh-ow James Bay Wilderness lodge, a new development in a more remote area, will require an operating hotel to address all utility needs, raising the question of how can a tourism venture cope with the huge cost of not only creating the infrastructure needed for operations, but using the latest sustainable technology.

Now, on these last three days, you can post your own experience and suggestions for development agencies about infrastrucutre needs!

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Megan Epler Wood

Location: Burlington, VT USA

Posted: Thu Nov 17, 2005 7:30 pm

Here in Honduras, where I am presently doing a consultancy, I have been tearing through a tremendous amount of information and hearing many presentations, and doing interviews.

The big issue is a brand new development that will be a very large project in the small Caribbean coastal town of Tela. The government has put a tremendous amount of planning dollars into it, and they are trying to very carefully manage the impacts of it. It is a traditional resort concept, but designed to be with green infrastructure. They are doing a certified green golf course, maintaining mangroves, and green zones, green corridors, etc.

There is quite a bit of controversy about the scale of the project, and I will have to be reading much more. But in the presentation I was given, it was explained to me that Honduras wants to generate maximum tourism revenues with green developments like this that are "contained" and are not spread all over the country. They have designated three priority zones for heavy tourism development. And they are taking a 40 million dollar loan from the Interamerican Development (IDB) to undertake this project. As part of my work, I will be investigating all the project documents, and plan to meet with IDB as part of my effort to see how and where cooperation between donors could potentially lie.

I found this very interesting, as though this is not ecotourism, and most ecotourism players here are against Tela, the opportunity to do green resort development or work with these players should not be snubbed by any means. We may well be able to work with the Tela development concept to help local operators and hotels to receive day trips and other more pure examples of

ecotourism. The accessibility of Tela to some of the most pristine ecosystems in Honduras is a concern, as the protected area system here is very weak. But with the right planning we might be able to really benefit many more communities and protected areas if the volume of tourism is increased by this mega project. At present tourism arrivals in Honduras is only about 600,000 per year including business travel and despite this, it is still their number one source of foreign exchange.

So I think, a country as poor as Honduras, needs to consider doing something on this scale as long as it is done right. I will certainly look forward to researching this more.

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Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Thu Nov 17, 2005 8:31 pm

Megan's very timely note brings three additional points to my mind:

- Governments and donors need to plan infrastructure according to “internal rate of return” calculations, i.e. the tax revenue generated & public services provided by each infrastructure investment have to justify it in economic terms– infrastructure is financed most often by loans, not by grants. THEREFORE, smaller scale ecotourism ventures normally do not qualify by themselves, but tourism development estates do. Once infrastructure is in place, and appropriate conservation policies protect natural & cultural attractions, ecotourism can develop. The case in Honduras is well put.

- The single biggest environmental impact of tourism (and the best opportunity to manage it) happens in the actual construction phase, and infrastructure may be the biggie there. Where/how you build access roads and utility structures, what technology you use, design and siting of rooms – this is what makes the largest difference. Energy and resource consumption in a hotel's operation are strongly influenced by these initial critical choices. This point is well made in the CI/UNEP publication “Tourism and Biodiversity: Mapping Tourism's Global Footprint” (you can download it at www.uneptie.org/pc/tourism/library/mapping_tourism.htm).

- If you incorporate sustainability into the actual designing and planning process, costs are MUCH lower than correcting it later on. In fact, the owners of Hotel Kaiser in Tirol (www.hotel-kaiser-in-tirol.com), a “conventional” resort in Austria that won many awards for sustainability (and which does NOT use this at all in their marketing, having found that most of their customers don't want to hear about it), when asked how much incremental investment they had had to put in to be such a model, clearly said: ZERO! When you plan with sustainability up front, your investment becomes your asset.

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Rick MacLeod Farley

Location: Canada

Posted: Fri Nov 18, 2005 10:26 am Post subject: Recommendations to Development Agencies

Over the last decade and more, I have had the opportunity to work with various development agencies while working as a regional staff-person and then as a consultant pursuing community ecotourism projects. All of the successful projects have benefited from the 'bright lights' in the development agencies that believe in the project and do what they have to do to make it happen. Often they have considerable internal obstacles to overcome before they can provide the agency support that is required.

Here are my recommendations for development agencies:

Build Your Capacity

Much of the development literature focuses on building community capacity.

One of the most important and most neglected things a Development Agency can do is to build their own internal ecotourism capacity - hire staff with specific ecotourism development expertise, train your staff in ecotourism development, and make sure your front-line staff have and use a full set of ecotourism development tools in-house or on-hand: including expertise with community ecotourism planning, community training, project management, infrastructure for projects (green building, green power,) and regions, and ecotourism marketing.

Ensure that your field staff and decision-makers understand and effectively work with the complexities of ecotourism and treat it as a unique and worthwhile industry.

A good starting point for development agencies is to assess your capacity to support ecotourism – measure your expertise, evaluate your success and identify your ecotourism development strengths and weaknesses.

Widely disseminated research into successful projects and the role that development agencies and their staff played in their success would be most helpful.

Use Ecotourism Industry Norms

Every development agency involved in assessing ecotourism projects should work with ecotourism industry data to compare projects appropriately.

A great ecotourism lodging 'norms' document is called the "The Business of Ecolodges: A Survey of Ecolodge Economics and Finance" - Sanders and Halpenny, The International Ecotourism Society, 2001.

Infrastructure Costs

When comparing ecotourism projects, infrastructure aspects should be looked at as a key component of the overall project and some effort made to benchmark related costs off of projects which have successfully addressed similar infrastructure challenges elsewhere. Benefits of the infrastructure specific investment should be evaluated in terms of both direct and indirect aspects.

Staff Effectiveness:

Development agencies should implement effective staff monitoring mechanisms including surveys with current and past ecotourism project applicants (successful and otherwise!) and community leadership as a form of quality and satisfaction assurance.

Development agencies should have a senior level ecotourism expert available who can support and monitor all field staff to ensure high caliber work and effectiveness.

Development agencies should also provide more than one access point for seeking support on ecotourism and other projects. While a single assigned main contact person is acceptable (often done by geographic region), there should always be a secondary contact available for situations where project proponents feel their project is not being evaluated effectively.

Appropriate Ecotourism Process

Ecotourism is a complex industry, and successful community ecotourism project development requires additional time and steps in order to be successful. Development Agencies need to expand the usual project development focus. Feasibility Study and Business Planning is only part of the process. Community Planning, Concept Development, Community Training, Infrastructure Planning and Operational Start-up Support are needed.

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Private sector/Public sector collaboration

MODERATOR: Steve Noakes

TOPIC:

1. Policy development for protected areas
2. Regional planning
3. Market research and development

Steve Noakes

Location: Australia

Posted: Sun Nov 06, 2005 4:34 am

Where tourism is still at an early stage of development, government generally plays a more active and leading role in its development and promotion. As it grows as an economic force and its commercial value also increases, the private sector becomes very interested in assessing commercial risk and investment/operations opportunities to create profits.

This on-line Forum gives us the opportunity to explore issues such as:

1. Why are public/private sector partnerships for tourism desirable and necessary?
2. What does each segment want to achieve from the partnership?
3. In what different ways can partnerships

evolve in more controlled & centralized economies rather than more free market economies? 4. How do destinations achieve the right balance for their circumstances from public and private sector partnerships? 5. What conditions must exist before destinations can develop effective public and private sector partnerships?

Let's have a global exploration of some of these issues on-line.

Steve Noakes

Location: Australia

Posted: Sun Nov 06, 2005 4:47 am

Canada: In the mid-1990's the Canadian Tourism Commission was formed, as a partnership between the national and provincial governments and the private sector. Previously Tourism Canada was 100% Government funded, but by 1999, the new CTC had 46% of its core budget provided by government & 54% in partner funding.

Cambodia, Vietnam and Lao PDR are currently grappling with the best way for each to individually established private public sector partnerships for national Tourism Marketing & Promotions Boards. Vietnam and Lao PDR still have a very centralist form of communist Government, whereas Cambodia has moved more rapidly into a free market economy situation where the private & public sectors are still working out their best path to move from 'relationships' to 'partnerships.'

California Travel & Tourism Commission, Tourism Queensland (Australia) are examples of State based private/public sector partnerships for tourism marketing. In both cases State allocations for tourism marketing funds are extended in cooperative marketing activities raised by industry wide initiatives.

If you have any other destination examples, please post them.

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Steve Noakes

Location: Australia

Posted: Sun Nov 06, 2005 5:06 am Post subject: First week summary

The Private sector/Public sector collaboration session for the on-line Forum aims to focus on

1. Policy development for protected areas
2. Regional planning
3. Market research and development

Where tourism is still at an early stage of development, government generally plays a more active and leading role in its development and promotion. As it grows as an economic force and its commercial value also increases, the private sector become very interested in assessing commercial risk and investment/operations opportunities to create profits.

Apart from considering examples from different regions of the world, this on-line Forum gives us the opportunity to explore issues such as:

1. Why are public/privates sector partnerships for tourism desirable and necessary?
2. What does each segment want to achieve from the partnership?
3. In what different ways can partnerships evolve in more controlled & centralized economies rather than more free market economies?
4. How do destinations achieve the right balance for their circumstances from public and private sector partnerships?
5. What conditions must exist before destinations can develop effective public and private sector partnerships?

A WTO Business Council report in 2000 revealed that experience in private-public sector cooperation around the world was rather limited except in the specific area of marketing and promotion, as well as some areas of product development and education training.

In countries which are transforming from more central economic control (e.g old communist states) to more open economies, there is a trend where stakeholders are recognizing that public-sector led marketing organizations are often less entrepreneurial and less effective in very competitive international marketplaces than one managed or led by industry itself – or as a collaboration between government and industry.

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Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Sun Nov 06, 2005 6:11 am

Hello, this is Oliver from Palawan, Philippines. Steve's examples bring me to share an experience I had here in trying to establish PPPs (Public-private-partnerships) in tourism. It seems to me that partnerships need a certain critical mass of players from the private sector so that checks and balances of power can be more efficient, and so that costs/investments can be shared. In Northern Palawan, there are still too few professional tourism investors, so that some players control the game and others, who could assist in some initiatives but would not lead them, stand aside and wait. Also, when your biggest player has a 120-room resort, sharing costs is hard.

Also, in my experience the organizational culture of the government agencies involved in a prospective partnership is very important. Often, newer agencies led by people with at least some private sector experience make better partners than large, bureaucratically led agencies. The issue, then, is to select the right partnership architecture.

I'd like to ask Steve for more information on Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, relevant examples for the Philippines. What's working there, and what is not, and why?

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Mike Robbins

Location: Toronto & Collingwood

Posted: Sun Nov 06, 2005 2:32 pm

Hi, this is Mike Robbins from the Tourism Company in Toronto Canada. There are some good examples of partnerships between the government and First Nation communities in Canada. Three good models are discussed below. The first and third are successful partnerships between First Nations and the government, in both cases a federal government agency. The second is a partnership between First Nations and government agencies, NGOs and non-native communities.

The Quu'as West Coast Trail Society

The Quu'as West Coast Trail Society is a non-profit joint venture among the Pacheedaht, Ditidaht and Huu-ay-aht First Nations, each of which have Reserve Lands along the famous West Coast Trail. Quu'as has a joint venture relationship with Parks Canada for the planning and management of the West Coast Trail, one of the three main areas within Pacific Rim National Park on the west coast of Vancouver Island. The joint venture was initiated in 1996 when the Chiefs of the three First Nations decided that they should take over contracting within the Park. The relationship is unique in that it covers more than just the management of the Park. The relationship is a business partnership with career training for positions within Parks Canada and mentoring assistance for new Aboriginal business ventures. Some of the funding comes from Aboriginal Business Canada (ABC). The relationship allows for the individuality of each community and the differing levels of economic development progress.

The business relationship with Parks Canada has four major components as follows:

- Service contract providing dollars for clearing, brushing, trail maintenance and interpretation
- Aboriginal employment initiatives covering training and development of cultural heritage programming
- MOU's with each community to help in developing cultural tourism in areas within and surrounding the Park
- Contracts for operating ferry services and for leasing land for the trail heads on Reserve

Quu'as is governed by a Board of Directors which is composed of representative from each of the three First Nations along with an ex-officio Parks representative. An annual workplan is prepared and presented to the Board by the Managing Director. A three year Business and Operations Strategy guides the relationship with Parks Canada.

In this partnership Quu'as and Parks Canada have recognized that treaty negotiations and the settlement of treaty lands is extremely important and will develop at its own pace. Quu'as is managed separately from the treaty process, and the contract stipulates that the initiative will not prejudice or otherwise affect any party involved in any claims or treaty process agreed to by Canada, BC and the First Nations.

Currently each of the three First Nations has two Trail Guardians working along the trail and one interpreter. The “Quu'as Approach to Training and Development of Aboriginal People” is an official employment equity program for the Pacific Rim National Park.

The following are the six objectives for Quu'as and Parks Canada:

1. Facilitate the development of First Nations businesses through serving as a point of contact to match services and clients and to develop a long term tourism development vision for the Trail and surrounding area.
2. Foster a greater understanding among visitors of the “cultural landscape” through things like interpretive programming.
3. Acquire necessary long term funding and develop services that generate internal revenue for member First Nations by marketing Quu'as and Quu'as member businesses.
4. Improve Quu'as management and working relationship, and communication between Quu'as, the three First Nations and Parks Canada through yearly planning sessions, regular meetings with the Board and mailings.
5. Revise the management planning once capacity building goals are reached.
6. Maintain and/or restore ecological and cultural integrity of the WCT and surrounding areas by performing environmental assessments on new projects.

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Clayoquot Sound World Biosphere Reserve

Just north of Pacific Rim National Park is Clayoquot Sound which was established as a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve. The development of the Biosphere reserve provides a useful model as well in that the First Nations communities (working alongside other communities) were an integral part of the designation and the development of the Biosphere strategy. The community vision for the Biosphere is as follows:

The Community of the Clayoquot Sound UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Region will live sustainably in a healthy ecosystem, with a diversified economy and strong, vibrant and united cultures while embracing the Nu-chah-nulth First Nations living philosophies of Isaak (living respectfully), Qwa'aak gin teechnis (life in balance), and Hishuk ish ts'awalk (everything is one and interconnected).

Together the National Park and the Biosphere Reserve form the core attractions for the west coast destination region which attracts significant tourism visitation every year.

Haida Gwaii, Queen Charlotte Islands

In 1981 the Skidegate Band Council and the Haida Nation set up the “Haida Watchman Program” in response to concerns about the potential for vandalism and other damage to old Haida village sites. The program began with several volunteers using their own boats to travel to the sensitive sites where they would camp for the summer season. They acted as both guardians for the preservation of the sites natural and cultural values, and they presented visitors with an introduction to Haida culture.

A total of more than 500 archaeological and historical sites have been documented in the Gwaii Haanas, and it is believed that at the height of the Haida culture there were as many as 120 Haida villages and camps. The population was estimated to be some 10,000 – 30,000 at that time. In 1774 the first Europeans arrived. Over the ensuing 100 years the Haida population was almost wiped out by disease. By 1900 there were only 600 people remaining in 2 permanent villages. The western red cedar was the cornerstone of the Haida culture.

During the 1970's and 1980's the environmental and Haida communities waged a battle to stop logging activity in the southern portion of the islands. In 1985 under the authority of the Haida Constitution the South Moresby area was designated a Haida Heritage Site. Logging continued until 1987 when Canada and British Columbia signed a Memorandum of Understanding to designate the Gwaii Haanas as a National Park Reserve. The resulting South Moresby Agreement committed \$106 million to the development of national parks for both the marine and terrestrial areas; compensation of forestry interests; the creation of a regional economic development fund; and a forest replacement account.

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Following 6 years of negotiation the Gwaii Haanas Agreement was signed establishing a co-operative management relationship. Common objectives for the care, protection and use of Gwaii Haanas were defined. It also provided the framework to make recommendations on planning, management and operations issues to both the government of Canada and the Council of the Haida Nation. This framework provided for the formation of the Gwaii Haanas Archipelago Management Board, with equal representation from the Haida and Parks Canada, the body charged with the consensus decision making process.

The agreement stipulates the following:

- The Council of the Haida Nation has designated the lands and waters in the Gwaii Haanas area as a Haida Heritage Site
- The government of Canada intends to designate certain lands and non-tidal waters in the South Moresby area as a National Park and a National Marine Park
- The Archipelago is to be maintained and made use of so as to leave it unimpaired for the benefit, education and enjoyment of future generations
- An objective is to sustain the continuity of the Haida culture
- Traditional Haida sustainable activities will continue to be allowed in the area
- The Minister of the Environment funds the participation of the Haida Nation in the AMB as well as providing funding for contracts relating to operation and management of the Archipelago
- Haida individuals are encouraged and given opportunities for employment with the Canadian Parks Service

Today the Haida Watchmen program has five sites in operation and employs 15 full time equivalent employees for the summer months. The visitor management strategy developed by the AMB defines an annual quota of 33,000 visitor days. Visitor numbers to the Haida village sites is limited to 12 at a time. Development is underway for the Qay'Ilnagaay Heritage Centre as a focal

point for sharing the Haida culture. The Qay Centre will house an extended museum, an interpretive centre, a teaching centre, a program management centre and a gift shop. Total capital cost is estimated at \$13 million with approximately \$7 million coming from Parks Canada.

Lessons Learned

Each of the above case studies illustrates a successful partnership between government and first Nations in protecting coastal environments and furthering economic opportunities for local communities in balance with the protection. It would appear that successful partnerships have the following qualities:

- ? Equal voice for partners
- ? Respect and understanding of cultural differences (i.e. timeframes, language, traditional knowledge etc)
- ? Business relationship
- ? Proper resourcing for First Nations involvement
- ? Employment opportunities as well as business development opportunities
- ? Cultural tourism development
- ? Built in capacity development and training
- ? Sharing of skills
- ? Respect for sacred sites as traditional territory

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Steve Noakes

Location: Australia

Posted: Sun Nov 06, 2005 7:16 pm

In relation to the Mekong sub-region, Cambodia will probably be the first to establish some form of public private sector partnership for a national tourism marketing & promotions board, but it has been a slow and challenging process over the past number of years. Support to getting a cohesive input from the private sector was given by IFC in Cambodia and the current ADB funded loan project to the Ministry of Tourism has been providing additional assistance. Maybe the relevant laws will be in place come early 2006. There will need to be a staged approach to introduce it with a strong Government position in the initial few years with the intent to lessen that input in a second developmental stage.

In relation to Vietnam which still operates under centralist communist governments, the notion of a 'private sector' is not clear - its more of the 'tourism business sector' which includes both government and what we would call private sector entrepreneurs. As with Lao PDR, they are committed to some form of public private sector structure which is being supported by current ADB loan funded resources. Additionally, the 3 countries Given their recent history of conflict and border crossings that were designed to keep people out, rather than permit the free flow of individuals, big progress has been made. I've been asked to conduct a 4 day workshop on this subject in Siem Reap, Cambodia for the 3 (very different) countries. Hopefully that exercise will assist each of them considering more options and helping them set and achieve their respective objectives.

George Duffy

Location: Black Diamond, AB

Posted: Sun Nov 06, 2005 8:03 pm

Mike Robbins has given some excellent examples of collaboration between aboriginal communities and Canadian governments to set up ways of protecting the culture and the local environment.

I know in the Queen Charlottes there are a few sailing charters and the like coming in. I know too that there are high end cruise groups coming to the islands as shore excursions from the mainland.

What I'd like to know, from the concept of ecotourism being an economic input:

I really like Jan's example in Mongolia where the local people started their own tour company which they now hire for various services. I think it is really important to somehow awaken, accelerate and facilitate this entrepreneurial spirit because there is an awful lot of potential wreckage out there if donors dry up.

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Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Mon Nov 07, 2005 12:54 am

I've learned from so many successes in Canada, particularly involving the development of effective sustainable tourism partnerships between government and indigenous communities. George Duffy's response to Mike Robbin's case studies brings me to ask to what extent some of those examples are dependent on significant financial support from government?

I guess one of the things coming up in PPPs is whether we can effectively speak of public as separate from private, when realities are often quite complex - particularly in developing countries and economies in transition. Let's face it, in poorer countries government money represents the majority of the economy - in Palawan the economy is 65% public according to a friend of mine who's the manager of the biggest local bank - and this is the provincial capital. In most developing countries, the government started the first hotels, operated them and controlled tourism overall. You would still be surprised how many hotels still have a large share of public ownership. Just 25 years ago, the biggest 2,500-room hotels belonged to Intourist in Russia! The question gets more significant if we consider that many upcoming destinations still have strong cultural influences from state-controlled communist systems. Think first of China, arguably the world's largest upcoming destination and origin, then think of Vietnam, Russia and Eastern Europe. I guess what I mean is that the The important point in tourism PPPs in

developing/transition economies is how much business/jobs are generated, and whether part of the revenue is set aside for public resource management (conservation, eco-efficiency, environmental management). New, creative mechanisms and models will need to be established for PPPs to adapt to those different circumstances of developing countries –what worked in Europe and the US mustn't be forced upon the developing countries.

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Megan Epler Wood

Location: Burlington, VT USA

Posted: Mon Nov 07, 2005 5:30 pm

I find that in ecotourism in general we are not seeing effective business alliances - to deal with even the most desired business outcome - better marketing. And while in Cambodia or Philippines it may be difficult, there are plenty of players to make this possible in Latin America. I know there are many established public-private sector models that have helped the private sector to develop better marketing protocols. I am looking for ideas that could apply in developing countries. While Australia and Canada probably have great models, they are technically based on conditions that are hard to replicate, so it is important to realize that when making suggestions.

What I want to foster in future are local or regional business alliances for ecotourism - that have Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reporting and marketing components, which could also foster technical support for community alliances. This seems so logical to me. I realize that this may not be possible in locations where there is not a critical mass of ecotourism businesses. So keep in mind I am thinking about this for areas where there is a critical mass.

Could you possibly advise on how I might structure public-private partnership that could help build markets for ecotourism, incorporate reporting, and also support community development. What type of structure do you think governments might be comfortable with and donors willing to support?

Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Tue Nov 08, 2005 1:55 am

Just a thought replying to Megan's "wish", based on some contacts I've been having with the IFC, the private sector arm of the World Bank. As you probably have heard, they are one of the first agencies actually giving out soft loans and even grants to private sector players (also in tourism, as can be seen here in the Philippines with El Nido Resorts and with Inkaterra in Peru's Machu Picchu) to make destinations more sustainable. This is breaking a long paradigm of separating business (private sector, loans and profits) from "charity" donations for conservation and social development (grants, NGOs, a certain resistance against business mentality). They of course need to go hand in hand as well.

One clear way to create such business partnerships are LOANS!! If banks could agree to create credit lines based on a combination of criteria INCLUDING sustainability (apart from the obvious, solvency, feasibility, assets and the like), and if these lines could be tied in pipelines specifically designed for those regional "sustainable tourism" platforms. But there are financial institutions examining this, and some trade associations could assist.

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Mike Robbins

Location: Toronto & Collingwood

Posted: Tue Nov 08, 2005 8:52 am

George Duffy asked:

What I'd like to know, from the concept of ecotourism being an economic input:

"Are any of these areas economically self sustaining?"

Is there any linkage between income generated from tourism and expenditures?

Have there been any examples of local enterprise, investment or collaborative ventures arising from these agreements which the local people earn income?"

Oliver asked:

"George's response to Mike's case studies brings me to ask to what extent some of those examples are dependent on significant financial support from government - the point also made when George talks about reduced donor contributions. I guess one of the critical indicators of successful PPPs is how much public investment leveraged private sector investment, and on a larger view, revenues... Mike, how would you evaluate the initiatives from this point of view?"

These are both important questions. My answer:

I am not aware of any comprehensive cost benefit analyses for any of the examples I reviewed in my previous posting. That would provide the definitive answers to the questions posed by Oliver and George. However I can shed some light on these issues. The First Nation situation in North America is somewhat unique. Most have been settled on relatively small and sometimes 'crappy' (i.e. low lying, marginal) Reserve lands, that represent only a small proportion of their traditional territories. Some First Nations do not even have that – the younger generation were relocated to residential schools and they lost the connection with their communities and traditional territories altogether. The fact that Parks Canada and a Biosphere Reserve would involve the First Nations in management of nationally and internationally significant protected areas is a very positive first step. They were of course the original stewards of these lands.

Yes there is a lot of government money that goes into developing these relationships – but there is a cost to go through the necessary steps to create awareness, educate, train and then develop economic opportunities in depressed communities like these. Employment positions are the next step. Entrepreneurial business development then follows. In each example there are entrepreneurial businesses that have started up in addition to the employment opportunities offered with the government agencies. It takes time and dollars to go through this process. But the benefits at the end are substantial:

- ? Employment opportunities
- ? Training opportunities
- ? Direct involvement in conservation planning and decision making
- ? Direct economic benefits to local communities from the substantial tourism visitation to these protected areas
- ? Help with cultural revival within a community
- ? Foster a sense of pride - Teach young people about their history and heritage
- ? Help dispel the stereotypical image of Aboriginal people
- ? Allow new Aboriginal partnerships with neighbours and businesses
- ? Share Aboriginal culture and heritage with the rest of the world
- ? Stimulation of entrepreneurial business development

They are good models.

It is also interesting to note that in Canada the First Nations and other Aboriginal groups are quickly and easily latching onto the concept of ecotourism. The principles of ecotourism are very complementary to their philosophies of living in harmony with Mother Earth. There are a number of First Nation ecolodges in the planning stages in this province alone. Cree Village Ecolodge in Moose Factory was recently awarded the highest honour and award by the Tourism Industry Association of Canada – see http://www.tiac-aitc.ca/english/ntawards_nominations.asp

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Antonio Suarez

Location: MEXICO

Posted: Tue Nov 08, 2005 5:30 pm Post subject: About regional planning and infrastructure

We must remember that whether we talk about developing or developed countries if we talk about regional planning we consider important infrastructure building and that these investments are usually done mainly or totally by public sector, at least at the beginning and to talk about some of the most efficient examples where less has been invested from public sector and more has been retributive to private sector I would mention the trans Canada trail coast to coast initiative where in some specific areas winter resorts have become all year destinations and variety of business have flourished along thousands of kilometers connecting a wide variety of tourism markets and destination, Chile, Spain and the US governments among many other countries are now developing serious strategies for green way planning and the main player for this to happen is still public sector.

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Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Wed Nov 09, 2005 12:48 am

Mike's response brings up yet another critical factor for the success of Canada's partnerships with aboriginal communities, even beyond the amount of public direct economic subsidies, in whatever form: a government that actually reaches out to traditional and indigenous communities. However belatedly and however limited, there are people there trying their best to reach out, and learning in the process. This is unfortunately not very common. There are examples of government support in developing countries, however, some of them quite creative.

In tourism PPPs involving traditional and indigenous communities, I find that one of the main issues is actually land tenure. How can traditional communities that have no legal right to land as counterpart be in a fair position to negotiate in sustainable tourism development? How can they finance anything? Here in the Philippines, I learned a lot from the Tagbanuas of Coron Island, an indigenous community who campaigned long and hard for a legal system here called Ancestral Land Domain claim, which after a lengthy process can be changed into Title. They got their title in the process of an electoral campaign 2 years ago. It is collective (granted to the Tagbanua Foundation of Coron Island and not to specific individuals), it comes with a price (they have to present a Land Management/Resource Use plan/Zoning document which they are now finding resources to fund) and the title is still subject to Municipal and National laws (i.e. they have to negotiate with local government and national Environmental and Development agencies), but boy did the tourism negotiation process change once the main tourism attraction in the Municipality actually BELONGED to them...

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Rod Bilz

Location: North Bay, Ontario, Canada

Posted: Tue Nov 15, 2005 9:22 am Post subject: Process for Private/Public Sector Collaborations and Funding

This is an area that I think could really use substantial work. I don't pretend to know the answers but I do think that it is imperative that all parties involved be extremely clear on the goals of the project and each participants role.

Part of the reason so many projects fail is unrealistic expectations and poorly defined or no goals at all. Also, far too often financial goals are the only ones identified because they are easier to quantify.

This is a very rough framework that could be used to improve collaborative efforts:

1. Mandatory meeting of all participants including private sector, public sector, community participants and donor or funding agencies to clearly define the goals of the project.
2. The goals should be expressed in terms of the concept of triple bottom line accounting that includes financial, social and environmental benefits and should have reasonable and attainable timelines to meet these goals.

3. Each sector should express their expectations for success under each of these three areas and specifically how success will be measured.
4. Once the goals have been clearly identified and specifically how the success will be measured, an assessment should be made to identify common goals between the sectors involved in the project. Chances of success of any project is that there are common goals and expectations. If funding agencies are only concerned with financial success, communities are only concerned about environmental outcomes and public sectors are only concerned about social considerations, then the chances of a collaborative success are greatly diminished.
5. Evaluate the overlap of common goals between all sectors involved and make a determination if it is significant enough to proceed.
6. Once the project starts, ensure measurements towards goals are frequent, consistently done and most importantly, communicated to all partners involved.
7. Continue to collaborate actively to adjust strategies to ensure goals are met or exceeded.
8. Regardless whether the goals are met within the planned timelines or not, a follow-up assessment should be made to identify strengths and weaknesses in the plan. Again this is an area that does not happen often enough. Failures can go a long way to ensure future successes as long as there is a clear understanding why it failed and what needs to be done in the future to ensure success.
9. Communication again. Don't sit on this information or put it on a shelf to collect dust. There should be a repository of these assessments so mistakes are not repeated and successful models can be replicated.

A central repository of this information would be hugely beneficial to all parties involved. Any ideas or comments on what I've suggested?

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Steve Noakes

Location: Australia

Posted: Tue Nov 15, 2005 4:49 pm

There is always the danger of transmitting unrealistic expectations to communities about tourism as a panacea for all sorts of economic, social, cultural and environmental issues - without the basic, risk/reward assessment and hard-slog realities of starting and operating any business - especially if its a tourism business that wants/needs to deliver a quality product and get into international or even local domestic market distribution chains. Depending on the location, there are a variety of cultural perceptions and procedures that also need to be considered in developing and implementing the bets model for a given situation.

Megan Epler Wood

Location: Burlington, VT USA

Posted: Wed Nov 16, 2005 8:11 am

Interestingly here in Honduras the government is about to change, but the donor project I am working for which was formulated several years ago by individuals no longer in Honduras had emphasized that Honduras should become part of the Sustainable Tourism Network of the Americas which is dedicated to bringing all countries into a tourism certification process. The officials in the tourism ministry here have resisted taking the funds for a certification program for 2 years. I met with them on my first day. It was explained to me that Honduras has 95% small and micro enterprises, family owned tourism businesses. It was clear to the ministry that these businesses could not afford to take part in certification processes, would achieve no cost savings, there would be no market for it, and there was no entity in Honduras that could afford to manage the project.

When I asked what their priorities were, they said that they have formulated a National Sustainable Tourism Strategy, which emphasizes land use planning and the sustainable use of land with protected corridors, green zones, and green infrastructure planning in order to allow tourism to grow sustainably within the country. I saw some of their plans and they appeared to be outstanding.

When I met with the officials for my project, I presented the importance of clarifying the goals of the tourism project to ensure that the businesses that are presently in Honduras would benefit, that the project would work to build competitiveness, and offset poverty. There was universal agreement with this approach.

I am now in the process of working with the project to clarify the goals and directions via a process of interviews with stakeholders. I have also strongly recommended that the project seeks to work in cooperation with the government and other donors on the National Tourism Strategy.

We will have to be certain that the National Tourism Strategy will be carried forward in the next government, but implementation funding is scheduled to begin early next year which should ensure continuity of policy.

I wanted to share this, because I feel the clarity of design of a project that is in harmony with local needs and objectives is so important.

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Jamie Sweeting

Location: Washington D.C.

Posted: Thu Nov 17, 2005 11:31 am Post subject: Private/Public and NGO partnerships?

I certainly see major opportunities for greater collaboration between the private sector and government agencies, national parks managers etc. I also see the need for NGOs to play more of a role in facilitating these kinds of alliances and developing mutually beneficial initiatives.

Much of my work the past five years has been with the more traditional, mainstream tourism industry and my gross generalization is that the private sector sees government as those people they have to keep happy by complying with regulations and laws. And when negotiating for development projects they use highly sophisticated methods and individuals to maximize their ability to get the best 'deal' they can get.

NGO and funding agencies, can perhaps, help foster a more progressive relationship by working with government to create a more positive mechanism for achieving their desired results (most often more tourists, jobs, foreign investment, GDP earnings etc.) where companies are provided incentives (tax breaks, longer concessions etc.) for achieving good practices (these can include many different targets -- environmental, social and economic).

The private sector, on the other hand, needs to recognize that the expectations of society are changing and that they need to manage their investment risks more effectively -- and these risks include an erosion of their product quality, health and safety. Integral to these issues are environmental and social issues in the destinations these companies are operating in. They need to work with government agencies to more effectively, and jointly, minimize these risks (via land use planning, adequate infrastructure - sewage treatment, clean water provision etc.)

When CEOs of major tourism corporations express their concerns about these issues I know that perhaps Malcolm Gladwell's *Tipping Point* is not as far away as we might think!

Finance for SMEs

MODERATOR: Jeanine Corvetto

TOPIC:

1. SME finance needs

Rod Bilz

Location: North Bay, Ontario, Canada

Posted: Thu Nov 03, 2005 7:19 am Post subject: SME Finance Needs

My company (FRi Ecological Services) is a fairly small company and we have had great successes domestically in developing community-based tourism products.

Part of reason for success is our ability to be flexible, deal with our clients at a personal level that larger companies cannot do. This is a real advantage for us domestically.

However, on the international front, being small seems to be a distinct disadvantage. We have been working on the development of a sustainable tourism product in Guyana for a little over a year now. We have overwhelming support from the community, Ministry of Tourism, and other partners involved.

The difficulty is funding. Our company is too small to qualify for most funding sources. CIDA has a fund in Guyana that has had \$5 million dollars annually to spend. In three years not one cent has been spent because every company that has applied has failed to meet the eligibility requirements.

To access the funds, we will be forced to merge with a larger company to meet their requirements. I am resisting doing this because I feel it will significantly reduce our chances of being able to offer the one-to-one personal service that has been our trademark and may ultimately compromise our project. It is a very difficult situation. We have already invested a considerable amount of time, effort and dollars and have demonstrated that even though we are a small company we can accomplish the goals of the project.

BOT agreements are another option for financing but again they are not too practical for a small company. Anybody else have any thought on the role of small companies in international tourism projects?

Jeanine Corvetto

Posted: Mon Nov 07, 2005 7:30 am

I wanted to ask you some specific questions regarding your experience in financing your businesses. In the study I co-authored for the IFC with Megan Epler Wood and Pam Wight regarding Ecodge finance I found that traditional financing through banks was often difficult. Here are some questions:

1. Have you found traditional banks that are willing to lend to your organization?
2. If so what are their terms and conditions? Do they require collateral or other guarantees?
3. What other sources of financing have you used?
 - For start up
 - Working capital
 - Expansion

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Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Wed Nov 09, 2005 1:01 am

Banks, of course, and development agencies as well, want to lend money to those who do not need it. SMEs are the victims of statistics, or what is usually called actuarial sciences - the chances that an SME will default on payments or project goals is unfortunately often greater than with larger corporations. Those SMEs (quite common in ecotourism) that are serious and could be fully trusted pay the price.

I followed the successful journey of an ecotourism operator in Peru, Rainforest Adventures, and continue to be a fan of theirs. One of the interesting things they did to grow since 1998, and to be able to cover the "externalities" of working in developing countries was to associate themselves with NGOs, learn fundraising from them and cultivate donors for grants (not loans), using the true argument that they are alleviating poverty, conserving biodiversity and working for the common good. Well, some may say that partnering with NGOs is as much selling your soul as partnering with larger corporations to access the CIDA funds, but I wonder whether Rod considered turning the Guyana project into a "fundable" project to raise grant funds for?

Ron Mader

Location: Oaxaca, Mexico

Posted: Wed Nov 09, 2005 6:52 am

Introducing the Sustainable Tourism Bank Watch
<http://www.planeta.com/ecotravel/tour/bankwatch.html>

In the past few years experts have reported a high failure rate of internationally funded tourism projects, particularly in the realm of 'sustainable' travel and ecotourism. Precise figures and stats are hard to come by as institutions provide little public evaluation of this work.

It is time to ask financial institutions to be more effective and that requires improved communication.

Ecotourism and sustainable tourism have long been touted as key tools in conserving wildlife and developing local economies. The United Nations declared 2002 the "international year of ecotourism" and while there were a number of agreements and declarations, follow-up work since 2002 has been uneven.

What could be different? Financial institutions could make the contract process and the evaluation available in a reader-friendly format on the Web. They could post in-depth project development reports and offer access for stakeholders to comment about work in progress.

To build a constituency for such innovative work, Planeta.com has launched the Sustainable Tourism Bank Watch (STBW) to bring together multiple stakeholders -- including donors, communities, operators and media -- to review current financing of sustainable travel and ecotourism offered by International Financial Institutions (IFIs).

The STBW is not the typical 'watch dog' organization that distances itself from the institutions. The approach we have chosen is one that is more inclusive.

Institutions financing ecotourism, sustainable travel and responsible tourism are highlighted on Planeta's Financing Sustainable Tourism index
http://www.planeta.com/ecotravel/tour/ecotourism_fspot.html

To their credit, many financial institutions do provide information such as basic details of projects in the pipeline. What is lacking are details such as request for proposals and project evaluations. In fact, the request for proposals may be issued through the backchannel (email) with a two week window. This information is either not present on the institutional websites or difficult to locate.

In the past year Sustainable Tourism Bank Watch has published a half dozen original in-depth Q&As with bank staff at the Inter-American Development Bank Sustainable Tourism Policies, the World Bank and USAID. The project also links to resources published elsewhere on the Web, including criticisms of ecotourism certification prepared by Indigenous Tourism Rights International and questions raised by the Ethnotourism Project Mesoamerica.

The rationale is simple. Development banks are rarely aware of independent concerns about projects they have funded as they only hear from the project coordinators. The coordinators evaluate themselves and rarely inform funders of criticisms.

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Rod Bilz

Location: North Bay, Ontario, Canada

Posted: Fri Nov 11, 2005 3:47 pm Post subject: Fundable Project: Guyana

I would like to respond to Oliver's point about being innovative in the funding approach. The problem for a small company considering Build Operate and Transfer (BOT) agreements is that

often you are not in the business of operating a tourism facility. I would have to shift the focus of my business and a wholesale change in staff to operate a tourism facility to regain my investment.

I have recently considered partnering with a local college that has an Ecotourism Program and is interested in having a practical, real-life experience for the students and graduates. Using these trained individuals there may be a possibility of looking at BOT agreements.

Megan Epler Wood

Location: Burlington, VT USA

Posted: Fri Nov 11, 2005 4:41 pm

I was just doing a review of a business plan for an NGO in Central America that manages an ecotourism program. This business plan had been commissioned and paid for by a larger NGO. I was asked as a technical expert on business plans in ecotourism to review this plan. I was given some excellent guidelines for reviewing this business plan.

The business plan did not clearly delineate between the goals and objectives of the NGO overseeing the ecotourism project and the goals and objectives of the tourism program as a business. The goals of the business were given as standard NGO sustainable development objectives. But it was never clearly outlined how the tourism business's funds would be used by the NGO. There were no financials provided for the NGO, just the tourism operation.

There was a fundamental confusion in the document mixing private business and NGO objectives. It was unclear if the tourism program was there to actually create a viable and profitable concern or to provide a certain amount of funds to the NGO on an annual basis.

I think that such a business plan would have to be very clear about the relationship of the ecotourism operation and its financials to the larger NGO budget at a minimum. But this raised so many other questions about how an NGO can manage a tourism business, and if it is really possible to write a business plan that mixes the objectives of business of ecotourism with the needs of a NGOs for operational funds.

From my point of view, it is really not advisable to use an NGO structure to manage ecotourism. While it is not impossible, I was struck by how very, very sophisticated the business plan would have to be to make boundaries clear. I have seen some pretty sophisticated business planners work out similar issues in my time - but in this case, I found myself wondering why we would want small local NGOs taking on such a big challenge. It would be so much simpler to separate the two entities.

From the finance perspective, I think the issue is particularly dicey, as the NGO was seeking investors to underwrite their capital costs, but in this plan they were not offering a rate of return on investment. That seemed odd to me, but I was thinking they were assuming that they would receive these "investments" as donations, thereby avoiding the problem of having to pay back their investors. That led me to think that the NGO was really mixing apples with oranges, calling a donation an investment. But beyond that, they were just hoping their tourism business would be viewed by investors as a good cause. I didn't see why an investor would look at it that way.

I think this example shows the real difficulty of trying to mix these two types of models. Especially at the stage where new funds are needed for expansion - I was really wondering what investor would just give the money away to support a "business." It seems really tricky indeed.

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Rod Bilz

Location: North Bay, Ontario, Canada

Posted: Mon Nov 14, 2005 9:07 am Post subject: Getting the funding organizations involved and interested

I had originally invited the representative from CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) that I have been dealing with in Guyana to monitor this forum to give them a better understanding of the challenges tourism developers and operators face in developing economies.

He didn't reply and just recently a new person has been appointed to his post last week. I extended the invitation to the new representative as well. I have not heard back from him either at this point.

I would encourage others to invite those agencies you have dealt with in the past and may deal with in the future to have a look at these proceedings as well.

Jeanine Corvetto

Posted: Mon Nov 14, 2005 1:24 pm

In the IFC study regarding Ecotodge Finance I found that most SME ecotourism business managers had limited previous financial management experience and relied on "a learn as you go" approach to financing their businesses. The most successful lodges/ecotourism businesses were able to creatively combine several sources of funding to finance their construction and operations. Financing sources primarily included their personal funds and sweat equity, community sweat equity contributions, loans from local development banks, international financial institutions and local banks and grants from NGOs. Only a few businesses had an investor equity model where a large percent of the funding came from private equity investors. For the most part, finding longer term affordable financing sources was a huge challenge, even for those businesses that had sustainable business models. Partnerships with NGOs, communities and other private sector operators often improved the profitability and viability of ecolodges and ecotourism operators SMEs.

The financing challenges mentioned above are those faced by all SMEs no matter the sector. This is the reality of many small business around the world. However, ecotourism businesses face greater challenges because their business models are more complex since they depend upon a sophisticated international tourism marketplace where competition is local, regional and international. Therefore lending or investing in these businesses presents greater risk than for the average business. Micro credit organizations have found a way to manage the risk associated

with lending to small businesses. Is there a model that could be developed to assist ecotourism SMEs?

It seems to me that we need to understand the risks associated with these businesses and then find mechanisms to mitigate these risks/costs. One way to mitigate the risk is through creative partnerships where private business partners with NGOs, communities, International Finance Institutions (IFIs), and international donors. It does not appear that initiatives by NGOs or international donors have a good record of success. There are a substantial number of the projects sponsored by NGOs and international institutions that have failed because the business plans were lacking and they did not have professional managers to operate the business. On the other hand, NGOs have unique skills and assets that can help businesses reduce the costs associated with building a triple bottom line business model.

How can more of these partnerships be developed? What have we learned from those business models that have worked?

It would be great to hear from those SMEs that have experience with these creative financing partnerships!

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Emilio Kifuri

Location: Texas and Chihuahua

Posted: Tue Nov 15, 2005 11:35 am

Greetings, all. Emilio Kifuri here with Canyon Travel
<http://www.canyontravel.com>

In partnership with local communities, my company has built several lodges in the Sierra Madre (Copper Canyon). I was able to do this because I have 30+ years of experience and enough business (paying customers) to finance the construction or renovation of rural lodges.

First, a word about "ejidos" in Mexico. The land distribution system in which Mexico is very different than other countries. In our case, the ejidos are the owners of the lodges because they are the land owners. My agreement is to pay the ejidos rent, to train and employ ejido members, to subcontract services like horseback riding and pack donkeys, to purchase produce from them and to bring interested buyers for their crafts. This gives the ejidos an income which offers an alternative to just selling their forest to logging companies.

My company was able to construct lodges in the scenic locations without having the upfront costs of purchasing the land. Building sites were chosen not only for their beauty but also for their available water sources, a problem in much of arid Mexico.

Let me be frank about the risk in investing in this type of project. Ejido members, being of indigenous and mestizo descent, are the most disenfranchised members of Mexican society. The

state and federal governments made grants available to ejidos to build lodges as long as the travelers were backpackers and the lodges would not be in competition with the commercial lodge owners. This is one example of what Antonio Suarez calls the "cabañización" of Mexico. Lodges are built but not designed to be successful in the marketplace.

A few years ago Canyon Travel negotiated an operating contract with a lodge that been built but had not been maintained. Again, thanks to having a successful business already in place, we were able to bring the lodge up to standard for an upscale market with a focus on birding.

Let me be candid. This has been expensive! Operating costs include factors such as replacing tires every three months. I'm hampered by high financing costs, such as 14.9% for vehicles. Training local guides and providing full time employment even during the off season is particularly expensive but absolutely necessary for our market. Our tour operator's insurance has increased by 300% from last year. Income generated from catering to backpackers would be insufficient to cover the operating costs for developing such tourism services. Competition from other operators with less expensive independent trips intentionally blur the distinction between their services and ours.

I hope this snapshot of our operation contributes to this engaging dialogue on ecotourism. I am particularly interested in working with others in promoting a more "eco" vision of travel in Mexico.

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Ron Mader

Location: Oaxaca, Mexico

Posted: Thu Nov 17, 2005 12:23 am Post subject: Finance

I would like to mention that one of Planeta.com's most popular online conferences was 2002's Financing Sustainable Tourism

http://www.planeta.com/ecotravel/tour/ecotourism_financing.html

The index of funding sources is updated on a regular basis (and your assistance is always welcome)

http://www.planeta.com/ecotravel/tour/ecotourism_fspot.html

Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Thu Nov 17, 2005 1:56 am

The point about the "cabanización" is so common - investments are made NOT with a view to creating sustainable businesses, but to give politically influential players something to chew on until the next election - preferably buildings. If the request had been technical assistance, no can do... There are sooo many "ecolodge" buildings done without consideration of management, ownership and market, rotting all around the world...

The issue of offering feasible (i.e. relatively attractive) credit to SMEs in ecotourism destinations is another "make or break" factor, along with infrastructure. Emilio's problem is the same in all developing destinations - in spite of so many development agencies and banks creating some "soft loan" options, those programs get to the actual sites at 30-45% annual interest rates, and demand counterparts and guarantees that are insurmountable. Yet there's hope: as far as I know, so many organizations/banks are taking sustainable tourism more and more seriously that I believe some reasonable micro-and medium lending experiences should happen within the next 5 years.

As an initial contribution to the banks willing to take this up, I'd say work should initially concentrate on:

- creating pilot pipeline credit lines (why not begin with a few million US\$ as a test?) especially adapted to sustainable tourism, to be distributed by local banks: these should be compatible with the specific needs of the industry (often more on "soft" than on "hard" components, i.e. financing working capital, marketing initiatives, operating equipment, training and pre-feasibility studies rather than only facilities and/or land), minimizing risks by providing technical assistance in business plans and commercial partnership building, requiring strict operational safety procedures (to reduce insurance rates), addressing the need for guarantees (by accepting value not only for titled land, and by examining options for bank guarantees and reinsurance), adapting pay-backs to business cycles in tourism (2-3 years to establish a brand, creating systems to adapt payments to seasonal variation). It is actually not difficult once there's a strategic decision.

- Building the capacity of local bank branch managers to understand sustainable tourism. Often, banks have programs available for this (just ask and they'll tell you that there's no need to create such a credit line because it's already there...), but the fact is local bank loan officers know about crops, home building, financing stock and export, car leases, cattle and fishing boats, but have no clue what to do about ecotourism. If a bank launches a program for SMEs in tourism, it's essential to bring in the interface with the client - the local development bank officers who process the actual credit application (and is the one to say no to potential applicants).

- Actively sending savvy scouts to look for those rare combinations of capacity/value and market growth that would make successful demo loan cases. Of course, many good candidates do not go to banks (they look for something closer like venture capital or relatives, even loan sharks). Often, the ones that show up at bank branches are the shadier dealers who know the bureaucracy...

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Jamie Sweeting

Location: Washington D.C.

Posted: Thu Nov 17, 2005 11:43 am Post subject: Potential Loan Financing Sources for Ecotourism Businesses

One of the sponsors of this forum was Verde Ventures who are always on the look out for good opportunities to invest in small tourism companies that support biodiversity conservation. They have made two such loans to-date:

http://www.conservation.org/xp/verdeventures/portfolio/belize_lodge.xml

http://www.conservation.org/xp/verdeventures/portfolio/rainforest_expeditions.xml

and have several more in the pipeline. This may not work for every small tourism company but is worth looking into.

Jeanine Corvetto

Posted: Thu Nov 17, 2005 12:45 pm

The following is a summary for Week 1

Rod Bilz FRi Ecological Services discussed his difficulty finding financing for his product in Guyana despite the fact that there is \$5 million available to finance tourism projects. No funds have been spent because no company met the eligibility requirements. He also discussed the challenges presented by possible mergers since it would reduce the quality of his product. He has asked if anyone else had thoughts on the role of small companies in international tourism projects.

Oliver Hillel responded to Rod's comments by saying that banks and development agencies tend to want to lend to those who do not need it. SMEs unfortunately demonstrate that their risks of default are greater than for larger corporations. He identified Rainforest Adventures in Peru as an example of a company that was able to mitigate externalities of working in developing countries by associating itself with NGOs to cultivate donors for grants. He was wondering if Rod considered turning the Guyana project into a project eligible for grant funding.

Ron from Planeta discussed the high failure rate of internationally funded tourism projects particularly in the realm of sustainable travel and ecotourism. He discussed the types of things financial institutions could do to be more effective and make information more available and the lending process more accessible and transparent. Planeta.com has launched the Sustainable Tourism Bank Watch (STBW) to bring together multiple stakeholders -- including donors, communities, operators and media -- to review current financing of sustainable travel and ecotourism offered by International Financial Institutions (IFIs).

Institutions financing ecotourism, sustainable travel and responsible tourism are highlighted on Planeta's Financing Sustainable Tourism index

http://www.planeta.com/ecotravel/tour/ecotourism_fspot.html

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The Summary for Week 2

Rod responded to Oliver's point about innovation in the funding approaches. The problem for a small company considering (Build Operate and Transfer) BOT agreements is that often it is not in the business of operating a tourism facility and he would have to shift the focus of his business and a wholesale change in staff to operate a tourism facility to regain his investment. He noted that having trained individuals may present a possibility of looking at BOT agreements.

Megan joined in saying that she was concerned that some NGOs were mixing donations and investments and not creating clear legal divisions between these two types of operations. Also they did not clearly delineate between the goals and objectives of the NGO overseeing the ecotourism project and the goals and objectives of the tourism program as a business. This experience also raised so many other questions about how an NGO can manage a tourism business, and if it is really possible to write a business plan that does not create clear, legal boundaries between the business of ecotourism and the NGOs needs for operational funds.

From her perspective it is really not advisable to use an NGO structure to manage ecotourism. From the finance perspective, it was problematic since the NGO was seeking investors to underwrite their capital costs, but in this plan they were not offering a rate of return on investment. The NGO appeared to be mixing donations with investments and not taking into account investment returns that would be required by investors.

Rod said that he had originally invited the representative from CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) to monitor this forum to give him a better understanding of the challenges tourism developers and operators face in developing economies. He encouraged others to invite those agencies you have dealt with in the past and may deal with in the future to have a look at these proceedings as well.

Emilio Kifuri with Canyon Travel <http://www.canyontravel.com> discussed his partnerships with several communities and his success in building several lodges in the Sierra Madre (Copper Canyon). His 30+ years of experience and existing business allowed him to finance the construction and renovation of the lodges. Upfront costs were reduced through agreements to use the land rather than purchase. He discussed the high operating costs of these lodges due to their location and the community employment agreements. Also it is difficult for him to distinguish his product from operators with less expensive (lower quality) trips. He is interested in working with others in promoting a more "eco" vision of travel in Mexico.

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Communities and SMEs

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MODERATOR: Nicole Häeusler

TOPIC:

1. Assessing community priorities
2. Developing consistent community services
3. Linking businesses to community services

Nicole Häeusler

Posted: Tue Nov 01, 2005 11:05 am

Welcome to the discussion group "Communities and SMEs". I will be your moderator for this topic and was asked to introduce myself. My name is Nicole Häeusler from Berlin/Germany. I have worked several years as a Tourism Consultant specializing in Ecotourism, Community-based Tourism, Tourism in Protected Areas and Tourism & Poverty Reduction. I lived for six years in Southeast Asia, and I have just finished my two year contract in Bolivia as an Advisor for the Department of Protected Areas- SERNAP. In 2003 I published together with Wolfgang Strasdas "The Training Manual for Community Based Tourism".

I am looking forward to participating in a discussion about this very popular topic "Communities and SMEs" in Sustainable Tourism development.

Megan Epler Wood

Location: Burlington, VT USA

Posted: Wed Nov 02, 2005 9:41 am

I am greatly looking forward to this dialogue, particularly on communities and SMEs. In the last 3 years, I have been asked to do a fair amount of work for the donor community - primarily USAID - on linking private businesses to community development. I have had the opportunity to work on this matter in Ecuador, Chiapas, Mexico and in southern Sri Lanka. In each case, I saw very particular examples of need at the community level. Frequently I have been dealing with issues of ethnic strife between minority community members and majority populations running the government and businesses.

I have been a strong advocate for many years of developing tools to better evaluate community needs before initiating projects. I have long felt that we need to better understand the social and political structures of the communities we seek to work with first - before beginning full tilt business development.

I realize that this can be an impediment to business development - which must respond to investor needs. Normally a business should be able to demonstrate that it can reach a profit in 3 years. This does not really leave enough time to sort out very sensitive community issues.

It is for this reason, among many others, that I feel private business cannot properly develop true ecotourism without some donor grant support - particularly if we are seeking to develop

businesses in areas where poverty is high, infrastructure is poor, and ethnic differences tend to be sensitive.

I am hoping that private businesses can weigh in here with their own experiences in this matter, and particularly how they might imagine donors could provide assistance. Some of the businesses involved in this forum have a great deal of experience in this matter. I am hoping to find some practical solutions that allow donors to tailor more useful technical assistance programs directly to business development in regions that have been "left behind" by traditional business development.

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Jamie Sweeting

Location: Washington D.C.

Posted: Wed Nov 02, 2005 10:17 am Post subject: Cross-posting from Marketing Session

Noticing that Oliver's submission to the Marketing Session seemed pretty relevant here I have pasted it below...

In my experience there are only 2 ways to allow SMEs to get one step further in marketing: subsidies for 3-4 years AT LEAST (meaning training, technical assistance and persistent support), which will allow at least a few of them to pick up by themselves, or 1-3 leaders with a vision (the "follow the leader" approach). In most cases of SME networks that made a difference (in Guatemala with Alianza Verde, in Europe with the "Gites Rureaux"), there was an organization that stayed on for a longer time, or a larger "anchor" enterprise that "created" a destination but (a rare case) allowed others to benefit as well. No technology by itself can do this - or can it???

Jamie Sweeting

Location: Washington D.C.

Posted: Wed Nov 02, 2005 10:28 am Post subject: Timeframes and realistic expectations...

Conservation International (CI) has worked for many years with communities in developing countries and has had numerous experiences with regards to community tourism enterprise development. I for one believe this term "model" project to be a bit misleading, because the idea of a model is that it can be easily replicated...not something I see happening a whole lot around the World.

What I can say is that there are examples of community tourism SMEs that have spawned replication and local growth in the tourism industry - bringing with it entrepreneurialism...is this always for the good of the communities themselves, that is not necessarily for me to say, but rather them.

My question of the participants with a lot more knowledge of this area than I, is whether most communities would prefer to own their own business, have a joint venture with an outside business or would rather to just have a job, or have people buy their crafts, or buy their crops?

Nicole Haeusler

Posted: Wed Nov 02, 2005 12:48 pm Post subject:

I would like to summarize important points mentioned above:

1. There should be a linkage and cooperation between Private Sector, Communities and Donor Organizations in order to develop a successful community tourism project.
2. The implementation of a successful community project or SMEs has to be subsidized for at least 3-4 years (from my experience I would even say ten years)
3. There is no model project!

And the important question for me has been "...whether most communities would prefer to own their own business, have a joint venture with an outside business or would rather to just have a job, or have people buy their crafts, or buy their crops?"

I would say that this decision-making process is quite often highly manipulated by the organizations helping to implement the project. Most of the communities in developing countries do not have a clue of an idea what is tourism, so they depend fully on the information and recommendations given by the organization they work with. And the organizations they partner with very often have a strong NGO background. It is often recommended to communities that they create your own enterprise and do not work together with the larger private companies". "Joint Ventures" are not recommended to them. But I personally find Joint Ventures to be the most interesting option

Do we really have to create a community tourism project with expensive ecolodges, and many years of intensive training when frequently this does not lead to a successful story? Would it be not better to support the activities the people already do - like handicrafts, crops, honey making, medicinal plants etc. etc. by supporting the cooperation between the private sector (I am talking especially about 3/4/ 5 Star Hotels and "normal" tour companies) and the communities in their area?

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Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Thu Nov 03, 2005 1:51 am

Picking up on Jamie Sweeting's very good question, we had all three options in Northern Palawan, Philippines (please check www.sempnp.com for more info): an indigenous group in Coron wanted to become a full tourism operator and sell their own tours (and faced significant resistance from established players and lack of understanding from government officers), because they own one of the region's most important attraction, a wonderful karst island with lakes and caves; some traditional communities wanted to have a cut in tourism but through independent mechanisms like concessions (in a National Park where they lived); and some others just wanted regular jobs - this last one is probably the hardest, since you need sizable facilities to

generate significant number of jobs and at least 4-5 years to train some members of a fishing/agricultural community to become professionals in tourism.

I guess there are two defining factors for what level of tourism benefits/participation a community can achieve: their perception (the extremely important issue of previous informed consent to what is planned, and the need to keep an open door for participation. It is amazing how much most communities have been ostracized from planning in spite of all our lofty ideals...) and the degree to which they are already familiar with basic, key issues relating to any product development.

In my experience here, the hardest part was to translate service-economy concepts like the difference between capital and income, risk management, investment, and markets. I learned a lot here about the huge cultural gap between rural extractive economies and market-oriented urban service economies.

Rod Bilz

Location: North Bay, Ontario, Canada

Posted: Thu Nov 03, 2005 7:01 am Post subject: Community Involvement

I haven't personally had a lot of experience internationally in this area. However, I have been involved in a number of domestic community tourism projects that have involved a private sector consultant, a funding organization and the community.

More often than not I see the community leaders trying to steer the project in the direction they want while the actual people of the community are often ignored to a large extent.

The workshops that I have facilitated with the various communities are excellent opportunities for the people of the community to express their interest, level of involvement and vision for the project. However, I find very often that the community leaders have preconceived notions of what the project will be and therefore are only interested in those views that support their vision.

Community support quickly diminishes at this point and the project is then almost guaranteed to fail. Has anybody else had similar experiences? I'd like to hear your views.

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Ron Mader

Location: Oaxaca, Mexico

Posted: Thu Nov 03, 2005 7:26 am Post subject: Continuity and Communication

Earlier this year I was invited to the coffee-growing town of Pluma Hidalgo in southern Mexico. A new administration took office in January and officials convened a meeting to discuss the options of developing rural tourism and ecotourism.

Since then, there has been little advancement of the project.

One of the obstacles was that the new representative for "tourism" for the town is also in charge of educational programs and sports and probably a few other programs as well. Another problem is the lack of coordination or interest to coordinate efforts among the owners of the coffee fincas. To top things off, last month Hurricane Stan washed out major parts of the highway that link the town to the coast.

In the Sierra Norte (also in Oaxaca), there have been a number of guide training programs. But without marketing, many of the guides have taken other jobs. Colleagues complain that it's easier to find a bird watching guide at the water bottling plant than at the 'ecotourism' office.

As we review the role of communities in developing successful ecotourism, I would point out that from my point of view -- as a journalist and web publisher -- communities need to do a better job of communicating with media and with independent travelers. For this to occur, we need to insist that development agencies, NGOs and others offer incentives for communication and continuity. If there are guide training programs, we need to see an accessible and updated database, preferably online AND at the local tourism office.

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Pluma Hidalgo

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Prioridades para el desarrollo del turismo: un manual para Pluma Hidalgo

http://www.imacmexico.org/ev_es.php?ID=17200_201&ID2=DO_TOPIC

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Neel Inamdar

Posted: Thu Nov 03, 2005 10:36 am Post subject: Changes

Oliver Hillel wrote: I guess there are two defining factors for what level of tourism benefits/participation a community can achieve: their perception (the extremely important issue of previous informed consent to what is planned, and the need to keep an open door for participation. It is amazing how much most communities have been ostracized from planning in spite of all our lofty ideals...) and the degree to which they are already familiar with basic, key issues relating to any product development.

I'd also add the issue of time - which Jamie alluded to. The wants of the community will change over time -- especially as the tourism intervention will expose the people to new ideas, cultures and experiences. A community that may begin simply wanting to hold onto their existing

lifestyle will grow to want a greater say in the enterprise - especially where their resources are involved.

Tourism represents a change to many - and their level of comfort in that change will not necessarily be reflected in their participation in tourism. Any successful intervention - whether NGO or private sector driven, needs to reflect this.

Jan Wigsten

Location: Sweden

Posted: Thu Nov 03, 2005 4:25 pm

Even within the same countries, the livelihood strategies of communities or parts of a community, differ greatly. The communities I have worked with respond differently as tourism approaches, be it introduced through private sector, NGOs or donor projects. I have engaged in grassroots developments of tourism in as diverse countries such as Sweden (developed country) Mongolia (transition, nomadic and developing country), Suriname (the Amazon and developing country), Estonia (transition country).

Each community as a whole or as individuals are highly capable of creating their overall strategy. However, their experience in service provision and understanding of urban service needs falls short many times and it takes time to develop this. However, when given an immediate reward, like appropriate payment against work or service provision (which includes if the job is not being done, being held accountable). They respond remarkably well. This is the advantage of being an inbound tour operator working together with the community serving clients, as we are. We can offer an immediate benefit once we start somewhere.

Many NGOs and donor agencies often fail to include or involve market players in the early stages, which may distort the real focus.

And many of us, who work in the chain of distribution of rural services, need to learn more about approaches working with the initial steps of tourism development.

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The more remote location communities are found in (the Amazon, Mongolia), the more dependant they will be of cooperation with inbound tour operators or hotels. If they are near affluent markets (Estonia, Sweden) they may develop single service products quite well unguided, as well as direct sales. The latter often leads to an over supply of the same services and drives general revenue down.

Nomadic Journeys Ltd challenge now is to accommodate growth. It requires more partners in different rural areas. Mongolia is theoretically big, but there are few people in between. Transportation, telecommunications are non existent. We just can't get out to these locations in the short peak season we have and train the basics to communities and be confident enough to send paying guest's immediately afterwards.

Basic understanding of the concept of product ownership is weak, and community members may not feel responsible to meet our groups with the camels, yaks or horses on the day agreed. In many places around the world there is no training to be had. So I invested in and co-founded a Tourism College (Wind Horse College) in Ulan Bator four years ago. And hopefully, some day, we can enroll the youngsters from rural areas, when some anyway get their higher education in the capital. But what is needed is on-the-job training programs. To go somewhere else and be exposed where it is already going on, and with appropriate guidance. Then implement at home, and quickly be able to try it out on paying guests.

Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Fri Nov 04, 2005 4:41 am

Jan Wigsten's excellent comment on how efficiently tour operators can intervene in community development to balance effort and return and to make changes feasible in terms of market realities (as against NGOs and other agencies who may raise inappropriate expectations or create white elephants) prompts me to raise the other side of the equation: it depends on the operator.

Sometimes when the private sector intervenes directly, only a few community members (already "entrepreneurial") can jump on the bandwagon. Sometimes, a good NGO or project can actually raise the critical mass of potential participants, and can position tourism within a portfolio of development options (as against operators, who would reasonably only focus on their own business). Another problem I read about in the Sustainability Report of Voyages, a chain of Australian resorts who are pioneering in terms of social and environmental responsibility, is that when operators and resorts deal directly with communities, any benefits offered (like education, livelihood support or "affirmative action" job offers) tend to become normal expectations or even be expected to increase every year, i.e. when the businesses cannot keep the same level of support throughout, communities tend to perceive this as a sign of "not caring anymore" and this can lead to negative images. Finally, there is the question of optimizing credibility in communicating results - some customers may feel that when a third party is involved, there is less chance for greenwashing corporate social responsibility efforts.

This is what sometimes leads resorts and operators to either funnel support through NGOs or to establish a separate foundation for community outreach and conservation initiatives. And this, of course, opens a whole new can of worms... So, although there are lessons learned that can be shared, there is no modular approach to this.

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Richard Edwards

Location: Seattle, Washington, USA

Posted: Fri Nov 04, 2005 5:00 pm

There are nearly always going to be a chosen few who benefit immediately when an operator or other private enterprise comes in, while others are sitting by. But I feel this has been the most

successful process leading to developing an area for tourism. With that vested economic interest pushing forward, infrastructure gets put in to place and a model for success is there. We can look at a Lapa Rios-type model in Costa Rica, where other locally-owned lodges have been able to benefit from the trial of bringing an ecolodge to international prominence. Not everyone benefits, but there is a precedent, and if that first enterprise is able to show that running a SME in a sustainable manner is profitable and productive, and maintains or enhances quality of life for locals, then other potential SMEs are going to seize that opportunity and follow that model, at least partially.

Jan Wigsten

Location: Sweden

Posted: Sat Nov 05, 2005 6:05 am

As an inbound tour operator, I am sort of sorry to say that, we alone, produce better community benefits and job creation in a locations in Mongolia that are outside of protected areas, than any NGOs or donors.

Our best case is an arid and difficult place to live on. After a few years of "hiring the natives" approach, where we hired labor, horses and camels, local people responded very well and tended to like this job. One day one family came to me and announced they had registered their own tour company! It is the only example where we found our indigenous partners went to town and registered their own tour company. Now they are subcontractors to us, and get the bulk of their business through us, which includes running of a yurt camp (eco-lodge Mongolian style) a series of horse riding expeditions and treks without vehicle support which is being sold the world over. They successfully attract even film expeditions for documenting their lifestyles with international film teams. The folks in this region are proud nomads and have a sufficient number of livestock for a decent living.

In another area, with rivers and forests, we have for years been trying to develop sport fishing trips. Mongolia has 3800 rivers in its north. This is where we are considering jumping in with other external stakeholders on our objectives. These stakeholders include:

- a) An American missionary that stayed and invested in a saw-mill, and forestry was part of the livelihood of this community in the communist period.
- b) A gold mine in the headwaters of our fishery, partly owned by a former president of the country.
- c) A donor program that are among other promoting Game Ranching of Red Deer (kind of Elk for Americans...) which would attract overseas hunters to come and shoot them. This program also manage the buffer zone management of a huge protected area that is a wilderness.

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Needless to say, as tourism entrepreneurs, facing competition and shortage of time, it is hard to expand the work of getting stakeholders groups together. We just do not have the time, even though I have the experience of doing stakeholder involvement work. Yet, we know that we can

offer a good market for this community and many jobs. I also know that the coordination work of all these well-intended efforts is a very rough exercise when our priority is really to establish good conservation of the fishery, which is the partnership we require to be able to go out and sell fishing trips. We need to be confident that there are some fish of the right size in 3-5 years time because this is what it takes to get a flow of visitors going. The outcomes of these talks are uncertain. Why we have hesitated to invest in the marketing required, for years, is simply because we are not sure the integrity of the fishery can be maintained. It is hard for us to find the local partner that we need, that can provide us with the focus required to shake it and move it towards sustainability.

In this case, I feel I am looking at "a can of worms" and considering working with an NGO to assist us or create our own foundation. However we may also redirect our efforts elsewhere, to the alternative options, e.g. another community downstream who are blessed with the lack of outside interventions. Ironically, from our perspective, this creates a better prospect to establish grassroots tourism.

We are getting there, in many places, but the level of success (community benefits) depends on leadership and livelihood approaches of the community as well as the stakeholder scenario. And certainly, it will be a different "can of worms" in each place.

Antonio Suarez

Location: MEXICO

Posted: Sat Nov 05, 2005 9:23 am Post subject: Communities and communication

Community based ecotourism success is about 90% communication, but not from the community to the outside, it is mainly the lack of internal communications inside communities that stops long term ecotourism and any kind of development projects in developing countries.

While most of the training programs offered are just focusing on technical abilities it is often forgotten that community goals when deciding for an ecotourism project instead of an agricultural or timber project are closer to a social process in which local groups are looking for social cohesion and recognition. This implies a great effort for consultants to start a step behind what they thought was the beginning of an ecotourism project.

If we can just see that ecotourism projects are closer to local needs related to migration, gender, and recognition than just "conservation or even income" we can understand why marketing is not a priority at least in the case of Mexican indigenous communities and ejidos. Here, one can become a leader and start an ecotourism project whether it works at the end or not.

This recurrent discussion about marketing as a priority shows that most of the ecotourism consultants have not developed a strong understanding of local needs and aspirations.

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Mike Robbins

Location: Toronto & Collingwood

Posted: Sun Nov 06, 2005 6:55 am

I would like to discuss the concept of community-based tourism development through a case study in Canada's newest Territory, Nunavut. It provides some useful lessons in how to introduce sustainable tourism in remote Aboriginal communities. I have continued to use and refine the community-based tourism planning approach we developed in Nunavut some 24 years ago in many other remote and semi-remote First Nation communities in various provinces.

In the early 1980's the then Northwest Territorial Government initiated the first pilot project for community-based tourism planning and development in Pangnirtung (Pang), on Baffin Island. I was part of the planning team assigned to work with the community in developing the plan. At the time most of the Inuit in the community did not differentiate between actual tourists and federal or territorial government officials (non-Inuit) who had been coming in and out of the community on business trips for years. Their perception was these Qabloonat (whites) were anxious to complete their business and leave their community as soon as possible. There were in fact few tourists coming to Pang or any of the Baffin communities. The tourism industry that did exist in the Northwest Territories consisted primarily of remote fishing camps owned and operated by southerners (resulting in little local economic benefit), a few independent adventurers and the odd big game hunter.

At the culmination of our years work and consultation in Pang we developed a community-based tourism plan with strong community support and involvement, and a process that could be replicated in other Inuit communities. The plan focused on tourism that the community could control, through tour operators and organized groups rather than independent visitors. A major emphasis was placed on conservation and preservation of natural and cultural heritage resources. The plan was entirely consistent with today's principles of ecotourism (focusing on education, conservation/preservation & community benefits), a term that was not coined until the early 1990's.

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The success of the Pangnirtung community-based tourism initiative led to the completion of community-based tourism plans for each of the other Inuit communities in the Baffin, Keewatin (now referred to as the Kivalliq Region) and Kitikmeot Regions through the 1980's. These initiatives were all government funded but in the Keewatin and Kitikmeot Regions the regional Chambers of Commerce were the proponents, not the government. Once again I was part of the team that completed much of this work. Community-based tourism in this context referred to adoption of the following principles:

- ? The community makes decisions to pursue tourism (or not) based on knowledge of the pros and cons of tourism;
- ? Extensive community involvement and consultation is completed;
- ? The community develops a strategy (with outside expertise and assistance) which defines how much control the community should have, and the events, activities and places that can and cannot be shared with tourists;

- ? The community makes strategic investments to be a catalyst for private sector investment; and
- ? The community continues to monitor and evaluate tourism initiatives and development.

At the time we initiated our work Pang did not have much to offer visitors other than a trip down the fiord (with the one outfitter) to Auyuittuq National Park Reserve, a visit to the Park headquarters, with limited interpretation displays or a visit to the local print shop and weaving centre. The hotel, owned and run by a southerner was run down and overly expensive and was focused on southern fishermen and contractors. The few tourists who were coming to the community at this point were typically self sufficient independent adventure travellers (hikers and climbers) traveling into Auyuittuq or fishermen staying at the local Lodge. There was very little benefit to the local Inuit, other than those few who were working for Parks Canada and/or the Lodge.

In 1999 it was estimated the tourism sector in Pang accounted for 35 permanent and 14 seasonal jobs in addition to providing income for over 100 home-based artists (10% of local jobs). Significant progress has been achieved but there are still many issues to be resolved and worked on.

The diversity of Inuit owned and operated tourism products and experiences across Nunavut today is extraordinary ranging from boat trips to view old whaling stations or whaling ship over-wintering sites, or staying at a remote ecolodge like Bathurst Inlet in the Kitikmeot Region or Sila Lodge in Ukkusiksalik National Park, to traveling the Arctic with an Inuit owned expedition cruising company like the recently launched Cruise North (July 2005). All of the 25 communities have at least basic tourist lodge or hotel accommodations, and some have alternative accommodation such as B&B's. And there are many trained professional outfitters and guides throughout Nunavut. There are many good models of Inuit owned and operated tourism businesses throughout Nunavut. Both Bathurst Inlet Lodge and Sila Lodge are owned and operated as partnerships between Inuit families or communities and non-Inuit living in the north.

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They have both been operating successfully for many years – Sila Lodge was built in 1986 and Bathurst Inlet Lodge has operated since 1969. Both lodges hire locally and buy needed goods and services locally to the extent possible. These two examples clearly illustrate the benefits of Inuit tourism in Nunavut:

- the strong interest in Inuit culture from visitors creates pride for local people in their culture and home;
- provides steady seasonal employment in communities with high unemployment rates and little opportunity other than government;
- tourism business assets can also benefit the local people – for example a bus used to transport guests is often chartered by the community in the off-season for conferences or government meetings;
- stimulates preservation of artifacts, customs and traditional knowledge;

- education through tourism training helps to encourage an interest in knowledge and learning;
- encourages realization of the value and sustainable use of cultural assets like archaeological sites; and
- visitors learn about, and begin to understand the Inuit culture.

The Inuit in Nunavut, as in the beginning some 24 years ago, are interested in tourism as a form of economic development and employment, but they are also still concerned with community control to minimize the intrusive nature of tourism. There is a need, and a very significant opportunity for the Inuit to be further involved in the tourism supply chain, as most tourists coming into the territory are being packaged by southern companies. The keys to future growth of Inuit tourism in Nunavut may well continue to lie in more, and enhanced training opportunities for those working in the sector, better community and political awareness of the benefits of tourism, access to capital, developing more export ready products and experiences, and involvement in all stages of the visitor booking and travel process. These are common issues across the Aboriginal tourism sector in Canada. In an effort to provide the Aboriginal tourism sector with some competitive advantage and at the same time develop product to higher standards and maintain cultural integrity I would suggest consideration be given to an Aboriginal certification program, certifying products as authentic and as reaching certain minimum service standards. This approach has proven successful with Inuit art. The Australian Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program (NEAP) is a good example of the effectiveness and benefits of such a program.

Ron Mader

Location: Oaxaca, Mexico

Posted: Sun Nov 06, 2005 9:45 am Post subject: Internal and External Communication

One of the ways communities develop ecotourism -- particularly in Mexico and Latin America -- is as a response to a larger development program saying that such funds are available: do you have a proposal?

Lacking a long-term vision or even good internal communication the communities prepare something that matches the monies available.

Is it any wonder that so many of these programs fail? Community lodges close and are turned into storage sheds. I agree that most programs do engage or even ask communities what they want first. But I have a question how are outsiders supposed to listen to communities? When does a travel writer, for example, understand that the community backs a project ... And it's not just an doomed exercise cooked up by one or two community leaders and a development agency?

Could we, perhaps, figure out a short questionnaire, that we could share with a few community tourism programs? My challenge and my chief interest is receiving timely, useful information for Planeta.com and for the ecotourism resource section in Transitions Abroad magazine.

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Antonio Suarez

Location: MEXICO

Posted: Mon Nov 07, 2005 10:36 am Post subject: How do we know a community is back by the others inside

We first know that a project is backed by a community once it appears as a collective effort, How to know that? Just go there and talk to different people at different times. It is not that they are not honest but local assemblies are the most difficult decision making systems, once approved it will be closer to reality, but certainly that is far away from success, since communal land tenure represents one of the most conflictive areas at least in Mexico, most of these initiatives remain as internal projects where communities try to find the main support from the inside, so the end point in many cases is not ecotourism itself but with the time it can become an important or even a flagship project as it happened with San Nicolas, now Amatlan and many other projects. What we see at the end is that communities perceive ecotourism more as a tools to fix other problems than just as a way to start a green business.

I would suggest for every one interested on community decision making to attend at least once to a communal assembly.

Kurt Kutay

Location: Seattle, WA USA

Posted: Mon Nov 07, 2005 1:15 pm Post subject: Maasailand Experience

Wildland Adventures has had real success developing a particular community-based tourism initiative with Maasai in Kenya (mostly) and Tanzania. Much of that success has been due to two particular factors: 1) a strong native leader who is educated, well-traveled with experience in tourism who has his people's best interest in mind, and 2) we have worked through a local indigenous-founded NGO Maasai Environmental Resource Coalition [MERC] with its own decision-making Board.

MERC is dedicated to many aspects of Maasai social, economic, legal and environmental work, but reform of safari tourism on Maasai land in East Africa is also one of it goals. So, they view our Maasailand Safari program as a first, model initiative for how they want safari tourism to occur on their lands (which is where most of the wildlife is still found).

As an outbound operator, the way we are currently set up, it would not be possible for me to develop this kind of program among the Maasai just in terms of time in the field, but mostly of course, community relations as an outsider. I'm not as involved in the field as Jan is in Mongolia, but the best ways we have supported community-based tourism is where there is either a dedicated Inbound operator willing to work with communities (ala Rainforest Expeditions) or a local NGO or dedicated and savvy indigenous entrepreneur working on site who already understands our customer's first requirements for safety/security, comfort and an organized, guided experience. In many cases I realize this takes training by business, NGOs or development agencies, but make sure wholesalers who are going to bring the market are involved early on.

We can bring the market and work with Inbound operators, communities or their representative leaders or NGOs to develop community-based tourism programs, but we need some level of human and/or infrastructure development in place to step in. In the case of our Maasailand Safari program, it is actually three-part partnership between 1) Wildland Adventures, 2) MERC/Maasai communities, and 3) our Nairobi-based inbound safari operator who makes accommodation reservations and provides vehicles with carefully selected and trained driver/guides willing to work with Maasai trip leaders.

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Megan Epler Wood

Location: Burlington, VT USA

Posted: Mon Nov 07, 2005 5:04 pm

1. On the community development side, I think good quality local representation is really required in order to make communities effective players in the landscape of ecotourism development. The market for community-based ecotourism is not necessarily backpackers in my view. But it will be backpackers unless there is effective, community-private sector partnerships to make these projects meet quality standards in the long term. I think developing private sector/community alliances is key. These alliances could also handle marketing. This is the solution I recommended during my work in Chiapas, and despite years of conflict in that region, I was amazed how quickly the project was embraced. Local tour operators needed community alliances to make their projects work and the communities needed the local tour operators. In this case, infrastructure in Chiapas is already in place so this was not the problem it can be. So I do believe that donors need to focus on funding community private sector alliances in order to move projects forward.

2. The more I think about this, the more I think these alliances must be national or sub-national. At times, they might have to represent ethnic groups, such as the Masai? What we have frankly not seen to date in the ecotourism world are effective business alliances. And this is another powerful area for donor support. Some may question why donors should support business alliances, but my argument is that our industry is still emerging for many reasons having to do with the need to make it ecologically and socially very responsible - and that for this reason marketing and business networks have not taken off to date. If such alliances can be tied to developing more community projects, that could be especially effective in my view - as we need to provide incentives for business to work with communities and we need to also offer technical assistance to make certain it is done with appropriate technical expertise.

I also find that financing high quality market research - which we still lack in our field after all this time - might be best done at the regional level. As most of you know, there are few if any good statistics on ecotourism travel at the national or destination level. I convinced my project leader in Ecuador to allow us to do such research for indigenous tourism in Ecuador. The results were excellent and I think every project should consider having such research as the basis for beginning to consider what markets they are seeking to reach. But it is not really that useful at the international level I don't think.

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Kurt Kutay

Location: Seattle, WA USA

Posted: Mon Nov 07, 2005 5:27 pm Post subject: Demand for Indigenous/Community-based Tourism

If there be any question about it, I can say that more meaningful "authentic" cultural tourism is in high demand in the ecotourism segment of the adventure travel market.

For years we have seen how backpackers often penetrate rural environs before organized adventure travelers, and many community-based tourism initiatives, especially local private projects (ie. homestays, guide services, etc) get started based on backpacker/independent travel. So, I suppose there is a market and development opportunity for that, with its benefits and pitfalls of course.

But, if we are talking about more organized, potentially more lucrative and maybe more consistent, up-market ecotourism there is real interest and opportunity. We know from research presented at the ATTA conference by a MI State Study commissioned by the ATTA that cultural interests are strong in consumer demand.

However, I know from our experience in the Maasailand Safari project that there is also corresponding media interest in cultural tourism, especially when it is legitimately tied to conservation and sustainable development. We received abundant notoriety this year including the Conde Nast Green List award because of this focus.

Any way that we can bring about more people to people interactions on our adventure and ecotour programs the more good will comes out it between hosts and guests, as well as interest in the media and marketplace which subsequently generates more business.

Nicole Haeusler

Posted: Tue Nov 08, 2005 3:15 am

An important question was asked right at the beginning of the workshop: "Do most of the communities prefer to own their own business, have a joint venture with an outside business or would rather to just have a job, or have people buy their crafts or crops?"

And the comments were the following ones:

- Depends on the community – a model project does not exist as the situation is different in each community, even within the same country or region.
- The wants of the community will change over time – Community-based Tourism (CBT) is not a static situation but rather a "supple" process in which communities change their needs and requests.
- Not all members can directly benefit from CBT, but normally lots of possibilities regarding indirect benefits for community members or neighboring communities exist.

There was a strong tendency by the participants to support Joint Ventures between Communities and Private Sectors “to make changes feasible in terms of market realities” as against NGOs and other agencies who may raise inappropriate expectations but may distort the real focus as they often fail to include or involve market players in the early stages.

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Jan Wigsten gave good examples of the successful work of his company in Mongolia. One of the results was the setting up of an own tour company by an indigenous partner who is now a subcontractor of Normadic Journeys Ltd.

If private business is interested in cooperating with a community, both often need donor grant support – particularly “if the business will be developed in areas where poverty is high, infrastructure is poor and ethnic differences tend to be sensitive” – as the investment of time, patience and manpower will be much higher for the private company. For that reason it is important to develop practical solutions that allow donors to develop useful technical assistance programs directly to business development in poor regions.

While implementing projects for communities or SMEs, the following aspects were identified as the most critical ones:

- To translate service economy concepts like the difference between capital and income
- Risk management
- Investment (no profit, if you don't invest)
- Markets
- Role of the leaders
- Lack of coordination and communication between the different stakeholders within the community but as well outside the community (Media, independent travellers, agencies)

Before implementing a tourism business project into a community, the consultants, NGOs and or donor agencies have to understand much better the social and political structure or in other words the livelihood strategy of the community. “Even within the same countries, the livelihood strategies or parts of a community, differs greatly... But the level of success (community benefits) depends on leadership and livelihood approaches of the community as well as the stakeholder scenario. And certainly, it will be a different “can of worms” in each place.” And quite often consultants do not have this kind of understanding while helping to plan and implement a CBT Project. “Ecotourism consultants do not develop a strong understanding of the local needs and aspirations.”

It has been as well recommended to develop on-the-job training programs as (ethnic) communities are not so much used to our western school system (sit down and listen). They prefer the practical learning in the field by doing “things” - and the same is recommended for tourism training.

Key points of this discussion:

- Recommendation: Joint Ventures between Communities and Private Business
- Private sector, consultants and donor agencies have to understand the livelihood strategy of the community
- THE Model-project does not exist
- A well-functioning internal and external Communication is as well an important aspect of a successful CBT-Story

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Antonio Suarez

Posted: Tue Nov 08, 2005 5:11 pm Post subject: How to implement work with communities

There is certainly a different way to approach while planning CBT than usual strategies for any other tourism business. Communities will be more open to hands on labor instead of theory planning workshops which frequently become an important factor for failure, locals simply bore if not working on the field, the strategy we have found the most effective to link communities in to real tourism business has been Balams trail building school where we physically approach to the market needs through users paths, also it give us the possibility to gather local work force and environmental concerns into a real building situation, this has worked well IF tourists are already arriving to the place we are working. If we are planning ahead for future situations where tourism is expected to arrive it becomes more difficult.

Which has taken us as a consultants to the regular condition that we only work in communities where tourism has already arrived.

Tropic

Location: Ecuador

Posted: Thu Nov 10, 2005 5:24 pm Post subject: An example

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Tropic - Journeys in Nature, has worked with a wide variety of community projects in the Amazon and elsewhere in Ecuador, offering technical assistance as well as marketing support.

In the Amazon, Tropic has successfully marketed programmes run by the Siecoya, Cofan, and the Quichua community tourism networks of RICANCIE and Union Huacamayos and established its own exclusive community programme by developing a long term working partnership with the Huaorani.

Our initiatives include: co-developing community based ecotourism operations with indigenous communities, promoting and marketing independent community-based ecotourism operations, creating business alliances with other responsible private companies in areas where Tropic and communities have no product, playing an active role in industry associations to promote policy change, providing financial support for the Acción Amazonía foundation, and assisting with research in related areas.

This participation will focus our main initiative that seem particularly useful to discuss, not only in terms of Tropic's successes, but also for the many challenges that the company has faced in implementing them in its first 10 years of operation.

Amazon Headwaters with the Huaorani

Let me give you an example: A exploitative situation resulting from oil and timber companies, the combination of ill informed visitors, irresponsible tour companies and guides, and the lack of any effective Huaorani involvement in issues of management and control led Tropic's founder, Andy Drumm, to begin working more intensely with the Huaorani, and an inspiring community leader, Moi Enomenga, to set-up a small-scale model ecotourism programme in Moi's community of Quehueriono.

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From the outset, the idea was to pursue a balanced relationship between the community and the company. Tropic worked for nine months giving orientation and planning workshops in the community before opening the programme for visitors.

The hope was that the community would gain employment during organized tours by working as guides, motorists, helpers and cooks, and also receive a fee that would go into a special community fund; Tropic also encouraged the community to build platforms and rustic tourist cabaña alongside the Shiripuno River in the traditional Huaorani style, made with local palm fronds and other materials gathered sustainably from the forest.

Tropic would provide limited capital investment for the project and offer the community technical and background tourism training, being responsible for marketing, packaging, and selling tours to the community.

Elements in Tropic's Huaorani initiative include: direct but limited employment, capacity-building at the community level, opportunities to sell local handicrafts(micro-enterprise), investment in useful community infrastructure (canoe, motor repairs, radio), and a commitment to limit potential negative social and cultural impacts.

Recognizing the importance of promoting inter-community collaboration, Tropic has also signed an agreement with ONHAE, the Huaorani indigenous organization, to operate tours in the Huaorani Territory and was instrumental in helping it establish an entrance fee theoretically charged to all tourists entering the Huaorani territory.

Tropic's experience and extensive marketing strategies and connections with universities, journalists, and other activists, has helped produce numerous television documentaries, articles in international publications, and extensive documentation in ecotourism literature.

This has helped generate exposure and international attention on a macro-level to the Huaorani and their struggles, particularly oil exploitation. This has also served to generate initial visitors for the community and clients for Tropic. For remote indigenous communities with little contact

like the Huaorani, international attention (resulting from concerned tourists, academic researches, the international press, magazine articles, books) is one of the most effective weapons in counteracting the environmental and cultural danger exposed by increased oil company operations, and other exploitative practices encouraged by outsiders working in Huaorani Territory.

For more details, please review our website: www.tropiceco.com

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Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Thu Nov 10, 2005 8:59 pm

Tropic's experience with the Huaorani gets me back to Jan's uncertainties about the role of NGOs/foundations as against direct operator interventions (an issue that stayed in my mind), and on the need to focus not only on marketing, but on broader issues related to community empowerment, respecting the processes of inclusion, social development and cultural adaptation, which have a timing on their own. In Andy Drumm's case, he played both the role of social negotiator/development support and business partner, also being flexible to keep an eye open to opportunities in communication and media. Although examples like these are available, they are difficult if not impossible to institutionalize.

If someone like Jan would continue to work as a normal operator, the business side would go well and results would appear, but the social development side would depend on whether a leading community member can play the complementing role of translating the risks, bringing the community along respecting their own rhythm, and linking ecotourism to the broader social development issues. Ultimately, however, operators cannot be expected to play this role and most of them have enough of a hard time just staying afloat, selling and surviving, thank you very much!!

If, on the other hand, you go the NGO/foundation way, the extensionists will probably keep the social mechanisms in mind and keep negotiation doors open with the private sector, but it is only too easy for the project/program managers to start managing the project by and for itself, thinking of how to keep the program beyond the immediate goals, looking for more proposals, cultivating donors, fundraising, creating the NGO mentality that would deviate precious resources away from the immediate needs of ecotourism and social development... it becomes kind of a permanent fixture, regardless of its results for the direct stakeholders, community and ecotourism operators.

The experience I had here in the Philippines (a consultancy with a definite time limit and clear deliverables) brings some possibilities to this. Giving a project a limited time horizon focuses activities - either you succeed or you don't, but as long as there is a managing agency that remains and keeps the lessons learned, there is a chance of progress. Also, by setting up a project, you can hire short-term professionals in each slot (instead of the same generalists NGOs would tend to use). Jan, how about trying to raise funds to set up a professional time-defined

team (2-3 years seems like a good horizon) to work in your Mongolia project, competitively selected in a fair technically focused bidding, with clear deliverables and close monitoring of results? Not an NGO/foundation, and not only business left to itself.

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Megan Epler Wood

Location: Burlington, VT USA

Posted: Fri Nov 11, 2005 4:31 pm

Coincidentally I was just doing a review of a business plan for an NGO in Central America that manages an ecotourism program. This business plan had been commissioned and paid for by a larger NGO. I was asked as a technical expert on business plans in ecotourism to review this plan. I was given some great guidelines for reviewing this business plan.

The business plan did not clearly delineate between the goals and objectives of the NGO overseeing the ecotourism project and the goals and objectives of the tourism program as a business. The goals of the **business** were given as standard NGO sustainable development objectives. But it was never clearly outlined how the tourism business's funds would be used by the NGO. There were no financials provided for the NGO, just the tourism operation.

There was a fundamental confusion in the document about if the tourism program was there to actually create a viable and profitable concern or to provide a certain amount of funds to the NGO on an annual basis.

I think that such a business plan would have to be very clear about the relationship of the ecotourism operation and its financials to the larger NGO budget at a minimum. But this raised so many other questions about how an NGO can manage a tourism business, and if it is really possible to write a business plan that does not create clear, legal boundaries between the business of ecotourism and the NGOs needs for operational funds.

So from my point of view, it is really not advisable to use an NGO structure to manage ecotourism. While it is not impossible, I was struck by how very, very sophisticated the business plan would have to be to make boundaries clear. I have seen some pretty sophisticated business planners work out similar issues in my time - but in this case, I found myself wondering why we would want small local NGOs taking on such a big challenge. It would be so much simpler to separate the two entities.

Aivar Ruukel

Location: Estonia

Posted: Sat Nov 12, 2005 7:19 am

We speak about communities and ask "do they prefer their own business, a joint venture with an outside business or would rather to just have a job.."

My experience is that it depends on the existence of potential entrepreneurs in the area. Estonia is a small country, but even here one can find so many different scenarios and different levels of local involvement. In many areas local business-minded people had taken initiative, developed their own products and have control over their resource base. In other areas product is owned by companies from capital city Tallinn. Joint ventures with foreign partners are not very common.

I believe that community tourism depends on the "best members" of community. It is normal that not all people are involved... Even more, is not it dangerous to wish that ALL members should directly benefit of CBT? Would it mean the "monoculture" of tourism? Should not healthy tourism be in a good balance with other, traditional livelihoods?

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Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Sun Nov 13, 2005 4:49 am

Reading Megan's report on the business plan which mixed NGO and tourism venture (I have also seen quite a lot of mixed-up business plans, also involving government-backed ventures), I am reminded of the accounting concept of "ongoing concern" or business entity. Financial reports such as profit-and-loss, balance sheets and others (actual or projected) are prepared from the strict point of view of each business entity separately. When business entities are linked, such as holdings, concessionaires, franchisees or minority shareholders, each entity demands a separate set of reports.

The fact is that ecotourism is an interdisciplinary field which brings together many different sets of professionals. Sometimes things get confused (especially when biologists are asked to develop business plans and business administrators are asked to develop conservation strategies). Like accounting reports, business plans are developed for each business entity separately, from the strict point of view of each player, be it a tour company in which community members have shares and NGOs bring in assets, or be it revenue centers planned by NGOs or by governments. The revenue source may even be the same (sales from tours, concession or entrance fees, or rentals), but commercial agreements would need to clarify distribution percentages or commissions so that each going concern could set up its own business plan.

A colleague of mine at Conservation International (CI), Edward Millard, did some excellent work in CI's Peten program in Guatemala, carefully planning separate entities for community businesses, tour operators and the NGO in itself, regardless of the scale of the ventures - including legal analysis of risk, liabilities, asset segregation, Build Operate and Transfer (BOT) agreements and the like.

I found that it helps to see ecotourism ventures just like a bank or an insurance agent would, just to figure out the business implications of different organizational structures.

Nicole Haeusler

Posted: Sun Nov 13, 2005 6:52 am

COMMUNITIES AND SMEs - SUMMARY OF THE SECOND WEEK

Mike Robbins, a tourism consultant from Toronto, gave us an impressive best practise example of a CBT-Project in Canada's newest Territory, Nunavut, first developed some 24 years ago and reused in many other remote and semi-remote First Nation communities in various provinces.

He mentioned an important aspect: “At the time most of the Inuit in the community did not differentiate between actual tourists and federal or territorial government officials (non-Inuit)”. Mike and his colleagues developed a CBT-Plan with strong community support and involvement, and a process that could be replicated in other Inuit communities.

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The FOCUS of the plan: The community could control tourism through tour operators and organized groups rather than independent visitors.

He recommended CBT should adopt the following PRINCIPLES:

- The community makes decisions to pursue tourism (or no) based on knowledge of the pros and cons of tourism
- Extensive community involvement and consultation is completed
- The community develops a strategy (with outside expertise and assistance), which defines how much control the community should have, and the events, activities and places that can and can not be shared with tourists
- The community makes strategic investments to be a catalyst for private sector investment
- The community continues to monitor and evaluate initiatives and development

By now there is a great diversity of Inuit owned and operated tourism products within 25 Inuit communities (accommodation, guides, boat trips).

BENEFITS of CBT in Nunavut:

- Strong interest in Inuit culture from visitors creates pride for local people in their culture and home; visitors begin to understand the Inuit culture
- Provides steady seasonal employment in communities
- Indirect economic benefit for local people
- Stimulates preservation of artifacts, customs and traditional knowledge; encourages realization of the value and sustainable use of cultural assets like archaeological sites
- Education through tourism training helps to encourage an interest in knowledge and learning

KEYS to future growth:

- To enhance training opportunities
- Better community and political awareness of the benefits of tourism
- Access to capital
- To develop more export ready products and experiences

· Involvement in all stages of the visitor booking and travel process

Furthermore Mike recommended developing an Aboriginal certification program, certifying products as authentic and as reaching certain minimum service standards.

Kurt Kutay gave another Best Practise Example with Maasai in Kenya and Tanzania. He identified the following success factors:

1. Strong and educated native leader with experiences in tourism
2. Project worked through its own decision making board (MERC)
3. Wholesalers (be it a dedicated inbound operator, local NGOs or indigenous entrepreneurs) are involved early on.

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Megan Epler Wood emphasized QUALITY (“The market for CBT is not necessarily backpackers”). CBT has to meet quality standards - and effective business alliances between private sector and communities is the key to reach this goal, which can provide professional marketing strategies. Therefore donors should focus on funding these alliances in order to move projects forwards (“...our industry is still emerging fro many reasons having to do with the need to make it ecologically and socially very responsible – and for this reason marketing and business networks have not taken off to date”).

Kurt Kutay added that “more meaningful authentic cultural tourism is in high demand in the ecotourism segment” and that there is a real interest and opportunity in up-market ecotourism, especially if it is tied to conservation and sustainable development.

Tropic-Journeys in Nature, has worked with a wide variety of CBT Projects in the Amazon and Ecuador, offering technical assistance and marketing support and gave as well an impressive overview of their initiatives including the creation of business alliances with other responsible private companies. In the case of the Huaorani, Amazon Headwaters, the project has helped to generate exposure and international attention on a macro-level to the Huaorani and their struggles, particularly oil exploitation. (“For remote indigenous communities ... international attention resulting from concerned tourists, international press etc. is one of the most effective weapons in counteracting the environmental and cultural danger ...encouraged by Outsiders working in the Huaorani Territory”).

Oliver Hillel came back to the discussion regarding the different roles, duties and mentalities of NGOs (first priorities: looking for more projects, fundraising, deadlines of reports), Tourism Consultants (time limits) and Tour Operators (first priority: business).

He suggested that an independent agency should manage the remains and keep the lessons learned. “Also, by setting up a project, you can hire short-term professionals in each slot (instead of the same generalists NGOs would tend to use)”.

Megan Epler Wood gave an example of the business plan of an NGO, which did not clearly delineate between the goals and objectives of the NGO overseeing the ecotourism project and the

goals and objectives of the tourism program as a business. For her “it is really not advisable to use an NGO structure to manage ecotourism”.

Finally Aivar Ruukel from Estonia confirmed that you could find so many different scenarios and levels of local involvement in his country. Joint ventures with foreign partners are so far not very common. He believes that the success of CBT depends on the “best members” of community. For him the involvement of ALL members in a CBT-Project is even dangerous as it could cause a monoculture of tourism within the community, which could destroy the good balance with other livelihoods.

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Nicole Haeusler

Posted: Sun Nov 13, 2005 6:55 am

From my point of view Oliver's suggestion of setting up independent agencies coordinating CBT-Projects is a very interesting idea, which should be discussed in more details.

And I had another “Aha”- experience with Aivar's comment, which hopefully gives a push to the discussion if only some parts of a community or all members (committed advocates of participation models!) should directly benefit of CBT. Of course not, he says, as the “monoculture tourism” might destroy the healthy balance of other livelihoods!

By the way the concept of “Pro-Poor-Tourism” gives excellent background information regarding the integration of livelihood strategies within tourism projects, especially within the initial phase (www.propoortourism.org.uk).

Mary Finn

Location: US & Ecuador

Posted: Sun Nov 13, 2005 1:42 pm Post subject: Social impacts and finding the `Authentic Community Voice

First, I agree with many who have emphasized in different ways, the need to understand community's existing social systems and ways of organizing themselves (of making a living, and of making communal decisions, resolving conflicts, etc.) It seems to me that more often than not this important but time consuming and complicated step is not taken. Instead, I've seen even NGOs (who ostensibly should have been doing 'community development') take the easier road by working primarily with a few of the most outgoing and entrepreneurial community members, who basically dominated the community decision-making process. I've sat in on more than one 'community participation' meeting in which the 'right answers' were obviously worked out ahead of time and spoon-fed to the rest of the group.

From a business standpoint (and perhaps for NGOs with short time frames and small budgets), this approach may be much more efficient than a truly democratic but much messier participative approach. I do agree that there will always be natural leaders and followers in communities as well as in any other arena. The problem comes when there is no mechanism to ensure that these

leaders and entrepreneurs truly represent and protect the interests of the community as a whole. So I absolutely agree with one should sit in on at least one assembly go and "talk to different people on different times".

One should especially make an effort to talk to those who are the least visible and vocal, including the women and elders. They may be the least 'entrepreneurial' and most uninvolved in an ecotourism operation, but for that very reason may be the ones most likely to want to conserve the community's traditional values and social systems. On the other hand, those community members who most embrace ecotourism and who most benefit from these projects, may tend to be those most open to change and not necessarily as interested in preservation of communal values. And why should the other community members who wish to continue their traditional ways, be left out in the cold? I think there must be a mechanism for ensuring that benefits flow to these members as well, by virtue of being joint landholders and community members.

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These are generalizations, I know, but I have seen cases in which the whole balance of 'power' and 'status' shifted in a community to the younger members who were more open to learning English and other new skills. Elders and especially women lost both status and control over behavioral standards, and the emphasis shifted from working together for communal benefit, to letting each individual compete as he could for his own gain (with increasing conflicts within the community). Along with this came a not too surprising admiration for the relatively wealthy and 'modern' foreign visitors and their modern lifestyles and gadgets. (And an unfortunate denigration of local traditions). While the project's presumed goal was to help the community earn a 'sustainable living' off their land, the goal of many of the community members became to obtain the digital cameras, portable laptops, cell phones, mp3 players and designer clothes which were ubiquitous among the visitors.

I don't know what the answer to these questions is, except to suggest that there must be a real recognition that ecotourism can have significant negative social impacts (as well as positive ones like enhancing appreciation of natural resources.) The mere fact that ecotourism is developing countries brings local communities into close contact with much wealthier visitors with very different cultural and social mores means that some sort of social impact is almost inevitable. I think these potential impacts of any proposed project should be looked at just as carefully as ecologists do for the potential ecological impacts on the land. For me, that should include explicit plans for how to mitigate such impacts, and how to monitor what is occurring, etc.

And all of this should be done with the TRUE empowerment and participation of many different people and segments within the community, not just a few of the most powerful or entrepreneurial members. NGOs can play a role in seeing that this happens, though, as others have pointed out, NGOs also have their own agendas and shortcomings, and cannot be assumed to be willing and able to truly protect community interests. In some cases (at least from what I've seen in Ecuador), the NGOs who undertake ecotourism projects may be primarily focused on conservation and may not even have any experience or interest in community development per se (I was even told by one NGO rep that the social impacts resulting from a community ecotourism

project they supported were not their concern, 'as long as the community was conserving their land.'

As Oliver stated, "it is only too easy for the project/program managers to start managing the project by and for itself, thinking of how to keep the program beyond the immediate goals, looking for more proposals, cultivating donors, fundraising". This to me implies that there needs to be changes in the whole system – including the way donors evaluate NGO projects, and on the business & marketing side, the way awards and certifications and other public relations coups are earned, as these affect the way ecotourists choose a destination. Because as long as none of these systems truly reflects community social impacts, ecotourism operations will not see a benefit for taking the time and money to do the 'right thing' by a community. Therefore there will always be those who will take shortcuts, as that will be the most convenient and more lucrative route.

I think if we could just figure that out – how to make sure that the authentic voice of the whole community gets heard, and NOT just the voice of a few who purport to speak for them – we would have come a long way.

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Mike Robbins

Location: Toronto & Collingwood

Posted: Sun Nov 13, 2005 7:01 pm

I agree wholeheartedly with the numerous comments that have been made about ensuring participation of the broader community when initiating community based tourism planning. When we get involved in a project such as the one in Pangnirtung mentioned in a previous posting, we see ourselves, the consultants, as simply facilitators in the community-based tourism planning process. The community must make a decision to pursue tourism based on an informed understanding of the pros and cons. Any successful community-based tourism plan must have broad support and buy-in. Too often government agencies and NGOs try to impose tourism as a favorable form of economic development on communities, an approach that rarely works well.

With our Nunavut work in the early and mid 1980's we fortunately had sufficient budget to spend several weeks in each community a total of four times, in each of the four seasons. This enabled us to participate in community activities like bingo, weekend fishing trips and seal hunting trips. From the outset we knew we had to differentiate ourselves from the typical government employees who would fly into the community and leave as soon as possible after their work was done.

Over time we began to be accepted in the community and local people began to open up and share stories and information with us. We conducted a wide range of consultation techniques including:

- Community meetings;
- Local radio talk back shows;
- Drop-in sessions in our office;

- Individual group meetings with the many community groups, such as Hunters and Trappers, Drug and Alcohol Committee, Education Committee and Women's Committee; and
- Individual meetings.

We also made a concerted effort to learn some Inuktitut, at least some of the basic words, so the Inuit could see we were trying to understand and work within their unique culture.

Mary Finn

Location: US & Ecuador

Posted: Mon Nov 14, 2005 2:20 pm Post subject: How to encourage more of this kind of community involvement?

I was heartened to read about the level of involvement Mike Robbin's team had with the community groups in Canada, and I congratulate them on their conscientiousness and thoroughness in this regard. This is what I would hope we could see more of - ideally making this level of interest and involvement in the community-based ecotourism startup the standard, rather than the exception. Unfortunately, the time and money involved (not to mention the 'can of worms' factor) seems to make this type of investment unlikely in most cases. Unless someone is able to find a good source of financing for this somewhere.....

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Rick MacLeod Farley

Location: Canada

Posted: Tue Nov 15, 2005 10:13 am Post subject: Cree Village Ecolodge - community designed & developed

In reviewing the discussions to date on communities and SMEs, I thought it would be good to share some thoughts from my perspective as a private consultant who works with Aboriginal communities seeking to establish ecotourism projects.

I originally wrote the material below as part of a submission to the World Ecotourism Summit back in 2002, and it includes details on Cree Village Ecolodge by MoCreebec Council - whom I consider to be a world leader in community designed, developed and run ecotourism.

Fresh, final comments are further below;

For Aboriginal or Indigenous communities, ecotourism represents a development opportunity that can bring many economic, environmental, cultural, social and political benefits. The key for Indigenous communities to achieve these benefits is active involvement in, and genuine control over, ecotourism initiatives within their traditional territory. To achieve involvement and control, Indigenous communities must be much more than token players receiving fringe employment or craft sales benefits.

Indigenous communities must not only have the opportunity to be actively involved in developing ecotourism products and services. Indigenous communities must have the opportunity to

1. be involved in the actual ownership of ecotourism enterprises, and
2. to have their representatives play an active, leadership role in regional, national and international efforts to plan and develop ecotourism.

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Active involvement and control of ecotourism products and services by Indigenous communities will not only benefit Indigenous peoples. A vibrant and successful Indigenous ecotourism sector will greatly strengthen ecotourism as a global industry. The richness and diversity of Indigenous cultures and traditional knowledge is an incredible resource for the ecotourism industry, and for a world searching for 'new' models of economic and environmental sustainability. Indigenous ecotourism operators can greatly enhance product offerings, and partner with other genuine ecotourism operators to bring benefits to all.

Active support for the Indigenous ecotourism product development needs to be offered by regional and national development agencies world-wide, and by international bodies including the United Nations Environmental Programme. Active support for Indigenous ecotourism product development and planning, including active Indigenous involvement, control and leadership will demonstrate a genuine commitment to, and help achieve progress towards, environmental sustainability and appropriate economic development.

The antithesis of active involvement, control and leadership of ecotourism by indigenous communities and their representatives, worldwide, is a scenario which needs to be explored. On a global level, colonialism is a current reality for indigenous peoples who must struggle to re-assert control over their daily lives. Ecotourism growth without Indigenous involvement, control and leadership, quite simply, results in increased colonial pressures on Indigenous communities by outside forces, and increased economic, social, cultural and political disenfranchisement. It will lead to increasing conflict between the ecotourism movement and indigenous communities, leaving both sides weaker, and with less opportunity to protect their interests against resource extraction industries that have limited regard for Aboriginal territory or for the protection of natural assets valued by ecotourism operators and clients.

There are a limited number of Aboriginal ecotourism facilities around the world. Within Canada, one such facility is the Cree Village Ecolodge which is 100% developed, operated and owned by the MoCreebec Council of the Cree Nation community. This new facility located at the southern tip of James Bay in north-eastern Ontario is close to a site on the RAMSAR List of Wetlands of International Importance.

Traditionally a hunting and gathering society, the MoCreebec community spent five years designing and developing their new ecolodge facility so that it would reflect their traditional

values and principles. The community committee that led the development of the Cree Village Ecolodge was purposeful and patient, delaying construction of their facility until they were satisfied that the design was in keeping with their principles. The result is a gathering place for the community and guests from around the world that resonates with a sense of the MoCreebec people and their culture and traditions, and their vision for the future. In keeping with their environmental approach, their healthy facility features natural textures (i.e. organic bedding, wool carpeting) and is highly energy efficient which is a key focus given their sub-arctic northern climate.

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Cree Village Ecolodge (www.creevillage.com) serves as a model of Aboriginal involvement, control and leadership in ecotourism. Two key aspects of the success to date of the Cree Village Ecolodge, include the following;

- 1) the need for Indigenous communities to play an active, hands-on role in developing their own ecotourism products and services, in keeping with their own traditions and values;
- 2) the need for outside agencies to play a key support role by providing sufficient resources, including time, to enable appropriate planning and development to take place.

Indigenous communities must be involved in ecotourism product development, and they must have an ownership role in ecotourism facilities and operations. As well, Indigenous community representatives must have an active leadership role in regional, national and global efforts to plan and develop ecotourism overall.

Fresh follow-up comments:

- from the tourism INDUSTRY perspective in Canada, there is some indication of an increased appreciation for Aboriginal community ecotourism - most recent evidence is the selection of Cree Village Ecolodge as the national tourism award winner by the Tourism Industry Association of Canada in October 2004. This award to Cree Village Ecolodge was in the "Air Canada Business of the Year Award (Single Unit)" category.

-the development agency situation in Canada has not changed visibly, from my perspective, in the last five years, regarding their approach to Aboriginal ecotourism -- I have seen no indication of an increased willingness to involve Aboriginal leadership, or Aboriginal ecotourism leadership, in setting policy or developing programs for the development agencies

- in fact, the near impossible struggles to get development agency support for two current Aboriginal projects in development (Wa-sh-ow James Bay Wilderness Centre by Moose Cree First Nation in Ontario, and Kamestatin Lodge by the Innu's Tshikapisk Foundation in Labrador) may suggest that the lack of involvement of Aboriginal ecotourism community leaders (or even ecotourism development experts) as development agency direction-setters or decision-makers may be a large part of the development agency problems

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Mary Finn

Location: US & Ecuador

Posted: Tue Nov 15, 2005 10:41 am Post subject: On guerrilla marketing, backpackers and volunteers for CBEs

Hello Everyone, my apologies for late (cross) posting on this very important topic. I just wanted to share some experiences and thoughts on possible 'guerrilla marketing' tactics for small ecotourism orgs. This is based on a few years living and working with a small community in Ecuador, who had gotten a head start on some infrastructure and training via a small project with a local NGO. At project's end, there was no marketing system in place and the community wanted to work towards being able to manage their own operation independently. But of course they had no capital to invest, nor experience in tourism or any kind of marketing

In this situation, internet marketing worked well – and in fact, I can't imagine any other way they could have gotten started, since (as many others have stated), most tourism operators do NOT want to work with unproven organizations. So how to begin to get the word out internationally, and start getting visitors and income, while simultaneously empowering the community and giving them a chance to 'learn as they went'?

What we did was to begin a program of paying volunteers, and yes, backpackers, since these groups were much more inclined to be 'forgiving' in terms of things like relative inaccessibility, and of the service being a bit 'rough around the edges.' Many were drawn specifically by the chance to participate in some useful activities (planting trees, teaching English, even some building and other things.) The internet marketing we also learned as we went along. The first, admittedly 'rustic' website got on line in 2001, when I think it may have also been easier to get some attention online as traffic was less 'way back then' and other websites didn't have as much 'flash' and animation - <http://www.santa-lucia.org>

We also tried to follow some of the other things people have mentioned – like getting links on other, high traffic websites, and also , as Ron has stated, did as much networking as we could in the 'real world' simultaneously. My involvement in Planeta's forums helped to get me in contact with others working in ecotourism in Ecuador, like Andres and Michelle of Black Sheep Inn, Betty and Diego at Casa Mojanda, and Marcelo Vineuze of Alandaluz. In great part through these contacts, the community became better known, and was invited to join the local ecotourism association as well as the EcuadorVerde network. The community is now is pretty much up and running as an independent operation, and has even gotten some international recognition, as you can see on their new website - <http://www.santaluciaecuador.com>

I should add that I don't necessarily recommend this 'bootstrap' model using volunteers & backpackers, at least, not without several caveats. One is, as others I believe have pointed out, the type of visitor you first bring in can set the tone for the future of the operation. And unfortunately, not all visitors are as conscientious about (or even cognizant of) the importance of

community traditions and social issues. (In some extreme cases young volunteers seemed to have thought they were trying out for a part on 'college kids gone wild') It's very important therefore that there be open, community-wide discussions about setting and enforcing social norms and behavioral codes for visitors.

There are other downsides with volunteers (but this is for a different forum!), but the concept I think could work, with the appropriate controls, for other community and small enterprises. There is a market niche for 'volunTouring' (or 'service tourism') as well, that I understand is intermediate between a 'full time volunteer' who works 4- 8 hour days, and a tourist who does no work (I think it involve a somewhat extended stay, with perhaps a half day to day of planting trees or other 'attractive' and easy volunteer work.) Again, though the margins are lower on these types of visitors, on the other hand, they tend to stay longer (sometimes weeks or months), with an added benefit for a remote community that often these are less exacting as far as arrival logistics because of the longer stay.

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I am wondering what others experience may be in this type of niche. Also, it occurs to me that this is where ecotourism students might be able to help out with small emerging enterprises, while at the same time gaining some useful, real world experience for themselves.

My last comment has to do with the notion that backpackers are not an appropriate market segment for CBT. Having said that some backpackers and volunteers we found to be disrespectful of community norms, I don't think that's necessarily the case for all. In fact, I understand that there are different segments within the 'backpacker' label, and that 'upscale backpackers' (or what ever the appropriate term should be), can be a very lucrative market niche, and one relatively easily reached via internet marketing. In a recent visit to Black Sheep Inn, they seem to be very successful with what seems to me to be precisely this type of visitor – independent, somewhat economy minded, and therefore perhaps a bit less 'fussy' in terms of luxuries, but respectful of both the environment and local culture. If this is so, wouldn't this be one of the most ideal segments for CBTs/CBEs? I would certainly think Black Sheep Inns' success suggests that this would be so.

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Rick MacLeod Farley

Location: Canada

Posted: Tue Nov 15, 2005 11:22 am Post subject: re: Miker and Mary Finn on community involvement

I've pointed to Cree Village Ecolodge as a model for community designed, developed and managed ecotourism ventures. They did this by being patient, purposeful and persistent -- in fact, at one time they froze all the project planning efforts by the outside professionals until they pushed further ahead themselves on community dialogue and planning for their venture. With the community leadership clearly in charge, the outside professionals (architects, engineers, etc.)

were then directly challenged to try and go beyond their past professional benchmarks, to come up with appropriate ways to meet the identified community vision and objectives.

Planning on Cree Village Ecolodge took place over an extended period of time; five years in fact. The project did benefit from an initial funding agency that had a flexible program, and an individual at the agency who observed with some nervousness the delays involved, but 'stuck her neck out' to give additional time to ensure a community controlled process. She is one of the 'hidden champions' of the Cree Village Ecolodge story. She is one of the 'bright lights' that we need more of within development agencies!

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I should point out that Mike Robbin's firm, the Tourism Company (Toronto) was also involved in the Cree Village Ecolodge project. As part of my efforts to assist MoCreebec Council to try and secure capital funding support, we ran into a road-block in the form of an ill-informed bureaucrat who was giving a negative review to his agency. Our strategy for overcoming this was to bring in Mike's firm to do an independent review of the credibility of the project proposal. Their positive review did help tip the scales in favor of the project, and the agency did invest major dollars in the project. Mike's firm also developed the initial marketing plan for Cree Village Ecolodge.

I would certainly venture to say that in most cases community groups could do a lot more in terms of community involvement and community planning for their ecotourism projects if the individuals working as project developers did not need to spend so much of their time on trying to deal with the challenges, and roadblocks, that are created by the so-called development agencies!

The Wa-sh-ow James Bay Wilderness Centre project by Moose Cree First Nation is interesting in this regard. They have overwhelming support by their community to pursue the Wa-sh-ow project (i.e. standing ovations at community meetings!) However, their project has been stalled for a full two years now by delays in securing development agency funding approvals. These delays certainly take away from the momentum 'on the ground' in the community.

Mike and I are currently involved in helping to develop the Labrador Innu's Kamestatin Lodge by the Tshikapisk Foundation. This is a project which is running into severe funding agency road-blocks that the proponents are struggling to overcome. This is a wonderful project that is responding to a desperate social situation in a positive, constructive manner - only to be road-blocked by one development agency in particular that is failing to meet it's own mandate.

Canadian development agencies usually require projects to go through a standard planning approach (i.e. feasibility study, business plan, capital funding approvals, construction, launch).

For ecotourism work with client communities that my consulting firm is involved with, we tinker with this standard approach by adding extra elements - (1) initial community based strategic planning to clarify and reach consensus on the fundamental values, vision and objective, (2) concept development - based on community direction, market interests and place, for review and

approval by the community, (3) expanding the feasibility study to encompass community capacity, environmental capacity and other factors, (4) community training workshops in ecotourism development and management, community concept development, etc.

These extra elements take more time, but they greatly enhance community involvement and the quality of the ecotourism product being developed.

It would be great to see development agencies recognize the need for community based planning and training, and great to see them build extra funding support in for these critically important early and ongoing steps.

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Antonio Suarez

Location: MEXICO

Posted: Tue Nov 15, 2005 5:58 pm Post subject: communities, consultants and Internet

Now that some CBE sites are coming out I would like to make a review about how many of this sites are really updated by community members, what kind of autonomy do these communities have in terms of communication when we talk not only about marketing but just simple information, this will show a real measure of where communities are in relation to the internet and where consultants are, in many cases we primarily find the consultant working mainly on the internet marketing and shortly we find a sites where we can have marketing, communication from the base an a local guy behind these whole process.

Over 13 years of CBE we have only gotten one community in to the internet world, they started with it and it seems that they see it as a “trophy” they do answer the mails by themselves but they do not up date the site at all. www.parquesannicolas.com.mx

While checking other sites mentioned on previous messages I found the santa lucia site which is not even in Spanish so all this gives us a chance to think where are we going and where are we pushing communities, usually not the same path.

<http://www.santaluciaecuador.com>

Ron Mader

Location: Oaxaca, Mexico

Posted: Wed Nov 16, 2005 6:14 am Post subject: Communities and the web

Let me start off with my recommendation -- I would like to make a formal request to development assistance agencies and donors that they fund not website creation, but website participation. Make it incumbent on the grantee that they participate in at least two independent forums. Grants should include adequate communication training, which includes but is not limited to the Web.

Let's look at the San Nicolas website

<http://www.parquesannicolas.com.mx>

The site is in Spanish. It provides hours, phone number and email. By clicking on the left navigation bar, the site provides maps, a history and other details about the project. For a static site, it's quite informative.

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In my professional work, I recommend website development as a secondary step. First is obtaining and maintaining an email account. It's easy to set up, as we have done on the Planeta Forum, a specific topic in which participants can post news and updates. There are other websites eager to collect and distribute information this way, but let me point the way to a few examples on this forum

News about next month's Yucatan Bird Festival appears online
<http://forum.planeta.com/viewforum.php?f=24>

Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa
<http://forum.planeta.com/viewforum.php?f=12>

2005 Mushroom Fair
<http://forum.planeta.com/viewforum.php?f=3>

WHY THE INTERNET IS A USEFUL TOOL

A few years ago I had the pleasure of visiting the Black Sheep Inn and Santa Lucia in Ecuador. I offered the web seminar in Quito and discussed how Ecuador in particular could benefit from an improved use of the Internet.

Colleagues and I put internet training at the top of our list of seven recommendations
<http://www.planeta.com/ecotravel/south/ecuador/7.html>

"We have placed the Internet as our top recommendation as it complements all the following recommendations. Additionally, the increasing use of the Internet by independent travelers and media professionals make this an indispensable tool. We recognize that many tourists and stakeholders are wary of online communication and may not yet have the needed skills or technology access to take advantage of what the Web offers, but we believe that training in the use of this powerful communication tool is vital. In this respect,

GIFEE (Grupo Internet en Favor de Ecoturismo Ecuatoriano) recommends:

- Offer Internet workshops for stakeholders, teaching entrepreneurs, communities and environmentalists to make more effective use of the Web
- Encourage tourism officials at national and municipal levels to become comfortable with participating in online forums
- Encourage online announcements and summaries of all ecotourism-related events
- Improve government portals in the tourism and environmental ministries

- Make government portals more "user-friendly" for communities, with Spanish but also indigenous languages, practical tools, and greater use of easy-to-load graphics
- Network with already existing private portals, to avoid duplication and unnecessary costs
- Seek ways to finance needed infrastructure, such as rural telephone lines, and education in Internet use and apply new, inexpensive, alternative technology as it becomes available."

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Mary Finn

Location: US & Ecuador

Posted: Wed Nov 16, 2005 8:05 am Post subject: Communities, the internet and multilingual communications

A couple of comments regarding community empowerment in the internet and other areas, including basic communication issues. For example learning to speak English, which can be another major hurdle for communities wanting to receive a wide range of visitors, not just those who have learned to speak the local language.

First, Antonio, I agree completely that the Santa Lucia site should be in Spanish. Even on the original site which I developed, I'm afraid I did not get around to translating everything into Spanish, despite Ron's urgings and my best intentions.

Later, after I was no longer involved, the community was offered free website development with 'fancy graphics' and as I recall, the idea was that they 'had to` put up webpages in four or five different languages (including German and French). Well, a couple of years later, the community now has some pretty photos and basic information in English, but nothing in Spanish, as Antonio has noted. In their defense, they've found that almost all of their visitors are foreign, English speaking, and very few are from Ecuador (where natural tourism to remote rustic mountain areas has not yet become a popular pastime).

Worse, no one in the community itself knows how to update this website, and so they remain totally dependent on someone from outside the community to have the time and inclination to do this. And even more serious than that, in my opinion, is the fact that few in the community even feel empowered to answer emails, which are predominantly in English, despite some years of having volunteers to teach the language. And there are segments of the community who do not have any language or even basic internet or email skills, so there's also an issue of different levels of access (and power) within the community itself as those without email access or English skills are completely dependent on others within the community who do have these skills.

So I think there are several issues here regarding communities and communications with the 'outside world'. Getting back to the internet, it seems to me that it may be an unrealistic goal for someone in the community to become webmasters, though I agree, they should definitely have control over maintaining and updating the content. I imagine that most successful tourism

operators contract this service also, rather than being their own webmasters? The problem as usual for smes is lack of funds to pay for this type of service.

Some examples of the technical difficulties involved in the case of Santa Lucia (which is in a rural area of Ecuador): First, it's only in the past few years that they got telephone lines, and computers and (semi) reliable electricity to be able to even have internet access locally. Even so, any one of those things can and does fail on a regular basis. Add to that the fact that at best, they can connect on a noisy dialup line at maybe 14kbs, where the standard in the world is now moving towards animated websites that need super fast internet connections to download. So downloading many webpages is often impossible. And what about very remote communities that don't even have this level of access?

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In short, there are some real technical and cultural issues that need to be addressed, in order to allow communities to become truly empowered in a competitive and technically complex world. So I agree with Ron's recommendation that "development assistance agencies and donors ... fund not website creation, but website participation." (Though I see this as an ongoing process, since the technology requirements for even 'just' participation is ever changing)

I did take a look at the Parque nicolas website - <http://www.parquesannicolas.com.mx>

It is great, and I love that it's in Spanish. My only question is about their main target audience – are their visitors primarily from Mexico? Do they get many visitors who only speak English? I ask because I think that another major issue for SMEs in Latin America is not just the question of 'English' OR 'Spanish' , but the problem of having to maintain a site in both languages, which is at least twice the work! And what about indigenous communities in other lands, where multiple languages are needed? Do the Cree groups for example maintain their sites in their indigenous language, as well as both French and English? ¡Gracias!

Rick MacLeod Farley

Location: Canada

Posted: Wed Nov 16, 2005 11:34 am Post subject: correction plus

The Cree Village Ecolodge web-site (creevillage.com) is in english only, though a multiple language approach is in the plans. The Cree language in the community is strong, particularly spoken among the elders, but the working language in offices is English. I would expect that the web site may be in Cree some day.

For small community ecotourism projects, web site development and management is an important and challenging issue. It is an issue that will become even more important over time. The dual challenge is to develop local web capacity and have a professional web presence that effectively generates sales.

Does anyone have other examples of well-run web sites for small community ecotourism projects??

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Antonio Suarez

Location: MEXICO

Posted: Wed Nov 16, 2005 3:57 pm Post subject: About Sites and languages

I am sure that every site must be in the home language FIRST, otherwise it is seen, it many not contribute to the many other social and environmental post material values ecotourism is in theory contributing to within the community.

In the case of San Nicolas most of the visitors are Mexicans and the web site has helped a lot to link rural and urban communities to a common field in which community reaches not only technology but social recognition and visitors as well find a common ground to have some of the lost solidarity with rural people. (exchange ideas, experiences, and social encounters)

Again, in CBE money is important but not only money, it is a about recognition, most of the communities around ecotourism are still doing many other agricultural, forestry and collecting activities, Ecotourism still not the unique priority even for the most successful CBE projects.

Might it be a good time to think about how do we create community sites where we do not only pretend to sell ecotourism, but ensure active communication within communities through the internet?

Nicole Haeusler

Posted: Thu Nov 17, 2005 9:46 am

I am attending in these days the World Travel Market in London. Yesterday was the Responsible Tourism Day which offered interesting seminars and public events on this issue. The workshops and discussion groups were overcrowded with interested people, coming from the public and private sector.

And the summary of the discussions were that there is a great interest in responsible tourism and integration of communities in tourism development- and the interest is growing - but still there is a lot to do in this regard.

But I feel that discussion forums like this one could be a great help to understand better the problems we face in each corner of the world - and that will hopefully lead us to better solutions!

Jamie Sweeting

Location: Washington D.C.

Posted: Thu Nov 17, 2005 11:04 am Post subject: Final thoughts

One thing that really jumped out at me from reading this section is the need to do extensive work with certain communities (particularly remote ones or those with little or no experience of tourists/tourism), over an extended period of time, that focuses on what is tourism and what it could mean for their community and whether they really want it or not and how to control it. I feel that some of the most valuable work I have done in this regard was explaining to communities that they can be empowered to say "no" to tourists coming and that if they were to be invited to come that their access to the village could be highly controlled and that those controls could (and would) be decided by them -- I like the "host" / "guest" approach to tourism! This was often an alien concept for many villagers who were used to visitors (Gov, tradesmen, NGOs etc.) coming unannounced, with an agenda and never ceding control to them for 'managing' these interactions. I felt the Inuit examples were particularly compelling in this regard.

I certainly reiterate my contention that there is no such thing as a Model project but there can be some guiding principles that can be drawn from this important discussion -- what seems to work quite well in some situations vs. what rarely works well and should be avoided.

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Rick MacLeod Farley

Location: Canada

Posted: Fri Nov 18, 2005 9:34 am Post subject: Recommendations to developers for accessing funding

As a consultant specializing in community based ecotourism development, particularly with Aboriginal communities, I'd like to share with you my 'Top Ten Guidelines' for accessing financial support from development agencies. I hope you find these useful!

Top Ten Guidelines for accessing Grants and Other Funding for your Community Ecotourism Project

1. Inventory your potential funders

– including basic research such as deadlines, focus, funding amount range, guidelines, eligible costs, ineligible costs, process, ...

2. Short-list your target funders

– select funders that may be suitable for your project

3. Seek first to understand

– each funder is different and each has their own objectives
– research each target funders objectives, criteria
– “learn their language”

- find out as much as possible about them, if possible, before providing many details about your own project (keep it a little vague for now)
- talk to others who have accessed funding from them to gain a better understanding of what they will be like to work with

4. Develop supporters and allies

- build positive, respectful relationships with people in the funding organization (starting with whoever answers your incoming phone calls!)
- ask for help!
- identify allies and champions for your project

5. Seek second to understand

- gather further details on your target funders including information on past projects approved, and how approvals really happen (officially and unofficially)
- study in details the target funders objectives and criteria

6. “Speak their language”

- develop or fine-tune your business plan, including your financing plan, with each target funder's information and other needs in mind
- for each application for funding you need to develop a custom proposal to address the funders criteria, showing how your project addresses their objectives, possibly even tailoring your business plan to more clearly demonstrate how your project fits their program
- keep the story simple, positive and exciting
- give them every reason to say 'yes' to your proposal, based on their own rules and criteria
- don't give them any excuse to say 'no'!

7. Be politely persistent

- once your application is in their system, you need to 'babysit' it, politely checking in on it at appropriate intervals (not too much, not too little!) and offering to provide any additional information required

8. Strategically support your funding applications

- if questions arise, or clarification is required, respond fully and rapidly
- anticipate “curve balls” or surprises and consider how you'll deal with them
- if roadblocks come up, work with your allies and champions to develop and implement strategies to overcome them

9. Consider whether or not you should 'hire a guide'

- the “funding game” is challenging and time-consuming with a lot of grant money at stake – money that can help make your project financially viable
- consider hiring a professional project development consultant to assist with the funding process

- select one carefully, based on a combination of factors (i.e. demonstrated track-record at securing funding, ability to effectively listen to you and work with you and your team to achieve your vision, successful work on similar projects, experience working with your target funders)
- a project development consultant should also be able to assist with finding developmental funding – and should thus be able to help “pay for her or himself” in great part

10. Expect success, expect delays

- be purposeful
- be patient!
- be persistent!

Gracias! Meegwetch! Merci! Thanks!

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Toot Oostveen

Location: Honduras
 Posted: Fri Nov 18, 2005 10:01 am

"Last year at the World Tourism Policy Forum, the World Tourism Organization launched a very ambitious project ST-EP that is designed to encourage community-based pro-poor tourism through private donations and investment"

For all the other participants of this discussion I add some bullet points from Marcel Leijzer, the SNV tourism officer in La Haya, who is coordinating STEP and the contacts with WTO.

The current state of affairs of the STEP program:

- WTO STEP coordinators: 3 (4th being recruited)
- Regional STEP seminars: 8 (Vietnam, Cambodia, Pakistan, Tanzania, Benin, Mali, Ecuador, Nicaragua).
- STEP programme implementation: 2 (Cameroon, Ethiopia - Responsible Tourism Award)
- STEP programme identification: 4 (Mali, Zambia, Vietnam, Laos)
- Planned STEP identification missions: 3 (Tanzania, Rwanda, Mozambique)
- Joint policy/law formulation: 3 (Vietnam, Bhutan, Ecuador)
- Planned policy/law formulation: 2 (Albania, Ghana)
- Joint Regional Programme: 1 (Coastal Tourism Africa - 8 countries)

- Ideas for Regional Programmes: 4 (support to community based tourism enterprises in Southern Africa; action-research on government incentives for pro-poor tourism in Sub Sahara Africa; multi destination marketing program in West Africa; STEP award + training seminars for tourism enterprises in Central America).

- SNV tourism advisors: 20 (2004) to >40 (2005). SNV has an information leaflet about its clients and approaches in tourism. Anyone interested can ask me a copy because it is a bit to complicated to describe our activities and approaches in a nutshell.

Looking forward to your emails: Toot Oostveen, tourism advisor for SNV in Honduras and tourism subnetwork coordinator for SNV Latinamerica: toostveen@snvworld.org

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Marketing and Market Development

MODERATOR: Richard Edwards

TOPIC:

1. Internet marketing
2. Cooperative marketing
3. Event marketing
4. Destination marketing
5. Rural marketing

Richard Edwards

Location: Seattle, Washington, USA

Posted: Tue Nov 01, 2005 11:25 am Post subject: Welcome to the topic of Marketing and Market Development

Judging from the list of participants, this should be one of the most valuable and productive topics on the agenda.

Personally, I've lived most of the past 15 years in Costa Rica, working (diligently at times) in both sustainable development and ecotourism. Though I've worked in all areas of ecotourism development, sales and operations, I'm currently very dedicated to bringing effective marketing both to our relatively small company in Seattle (<http://www.wildland.com>) and to ecotourism stakeholders in general.

One of the main goals I would propose for us here is to make a contribution leading to the industry better reaching and influencing buying decisions within the potentially large market of socially-conscious travelers making uninformed decisions, but who could easily be persuaded to make more environmentally and socio-economically sound travel choices.

My first request would be for both comments on this goal and developing a small number of realistic goals, perhaps more specific, we could focus on throughout the 17 days of the conference.

Looking forward to this productive dialogue!

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Rod Bilz

Location: North Bay, Ontario, Canada

Posted: Tue Nov 01, 2005 2:02 pm Post subject: Marketing to Socially/environmentally conscious travellers

One hurdle I see in marketing socially and environmentally sustainable tourism is setting some standards for comparison. This ties in with one of the topics in the Triple Bottom Line Accounting - Ecotourism Certification.

There are a number of ecotourism certification organizations out there but for the most part they go largely unknown in North America. I think the North American market is a long way behind Europe/Asia/Australia in this regard. Organizations such as Blue Flag and Green Globe 21 are virtually unknown here in Canada.

They could be used as excellent marketing tools but they need to be promoted in North America more by the organizations themselves as a service to their members and by the members to better define this niche market in North America.

I'd be interested if somebody has an idea on how North American travelers can become better educated and aware of these ecotourism certifications so they know what they are paying for when they visit certified destinations.

Jamie Sweeting

Location: Washington D.C.

Posted: Tue Nov 01, 2005 3:35 pm Post subject: Business/market linkages - less leakage / more benefits

My principle interest here is to see how we can use markets (both direct to the consumer and within the supply chain) to increase competitiveness and profitability of tourism SMEs working in high biodiversity areas. The more successful SMEs are the more people they can employ and the greater likelihood for getting local communities to support conservation --because they see more economic benefit from protection than destructive utilization.

How do we more effectively help grow these kinds of businesses? How do we encourage European and North American outbound eco/adventure (and for that matter Mass Tourism) operators to be more proactive in seeking out and supporting such SMEs and promoting those that are most committed to making a difference in the lives of local people and conservation?

Jascivan Carvalho

Location: Ecuador

Posted: Tue Nov 01, 2005 5:00 pm

I agree that this topic may be one of the most important in this forum, being sustainable means making a profitable business.

Here in Ecuador most SME or CBE ecotourism projects are limited in several areas related to its commercialization.

I think that the best results we could look for is learn how our small enterprises can reach this "large market of socially-conscious travelers making uninformed decisions that can be easily persuaded" with limited marketing budgets and skills; I believe that if we can find practical suggestions many people and communities will be able to present their experiences to the world.

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Aivar_Ruukel

Location: Estonia

Posted: Wed Nov 02, 2005 12:29 am Post subject: Re: Business/market linkages - less leakage / more benefits

jsweeting wrote: My principle interest here is to see how we can use markets (both direct to the consumer and within the supply chain) to increase competitiveness and profitability of tourism SMEs working in high biodiversity areas. The more successful SMEs are the more people they can employ and the greater likelihood for getting local communities to support conservation -- because they see more economic benefit from protection than destructive utilization.

How do we more effectively help grow these kinds of businesses? How do we encourage European and North American outbound eco/adventure (and for that matter Mass Tourism) operators to be more proactive in seeking out and supporting such SMEs and promoting those that are most committed to making a difference in the lives of local people and conservation?

I am representing this group - "tourism SMEs working (and located) in high biodiversity areas". We have been in business 11 years, offering bog-walking, canoeing, cross-country skiing and other nature based activities in Soomaa National Park, Estonia.

It is not easy to reach markets, especially those that are far from you. My experience is that it is a continuous work - learning process of how to attract and deal with the Travel Trade. At least here in my country rural SMEs often have no skills and knowledge of how distribution channels work, how to design a product , and put a price etc.

Looking forward for highly interesting dialogue on that particular topic.

Oliver Hillel

Posted: Wed Nov 02, 2005 5:06 am

In my experience there are only 2 ways to allow SMEs to get one step further in marketing: subsidies for 3-4 years AT LEAST (meaning training, technical assistance and persistent support), which will allow at least a few of them to pick up by themselves, or 1-3 leaders with a vision (the "follow the leader" approach). In most cases of SME networks that made a difference (in Guatemala with Alianza Verde, in Europe with the "Gites Rureaux"), there was an organization that stayed on for a longer time, or a larger "anchor" enterprise that "created" a destination but (a rare case) allowed others to benefit as well. No technology by itself can do this - or can it???

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George Duffy

Location: Black Diamond, AB

Posted: Wed Nov 02, 2005 11:07 am Post subject: Marketing

Being a small tour wholesaler and also a marketing contractor for the last 15 years I have been involved at various levels of private and public sector policy making from volunteer work on civic, community and provincial tourism boards (in Alberta, Canada). At present I divide my work between promoting and operating my ecotour wholesale business, while carrying contract marketing for more conventional tour companies as a way to even out the cash flow. I want to touch on a couple of threads here.

Oliver, you mention that SMEs need perhaps 4 years of subsidy, and maybe longer. I can relate, as even a conventional tour business takes this long to start getting any kind of sales volume. Seed money and operating capital for various activities are critical. The challenge however is to have the fortitude to get off the subsidy train. One system we have in Alberta which is fairly good works like this.

There are three main guidelines for funding assistance. This is for marketing projects only.

1. The project must be new or incremental. In other words, you can't apply for money to subsidize an existing project.
2. The project must include at least 2 or more partners. Example, a lodge, a transportation company and a village museum.
3. The project must have an objective with a measurable outcome. It could be something like attend an adventure travel trade show in Vancouver and get the product placed in 5 wholesaler catalogues by 2007.

The program funds up to 50% of the hard marketing costs, and the partners fund the balance. The project can be no longer than three years. All projects are assisted by advice from a tourism marketing executive to make the project as successful as possible.

The idea is that by making private sector come up with at least 50%, the projects will be better thought out and planned for success. Having measurable outcomes helps focus. Having partners helps both to raise the pot of available money and really encourages packaging. This makes a product which "consumers" can easily buy.

The project must support the general marketing strategy outlined by the province. In other words, if the province has researched and found 3 primary markets and 3 secondary markets, there is no point spending dollars outside these markets as it would dilute the overall effect of trying to present the destination.

The thing that always creeps into the equation is transparency. We struggled for years to root out people trying to manipulate the system or for that matter commit outright fraud. The rules have to be adhered to in order for the investor (in this case the Government of Alberta acting as custodians of tax payer's money) to be able to report back that things were fair and level for all.

Well that is a bit longer than I intended to write, but I have found this system to work quite well for SMEs because all too often the top down programs from tourism boards are beyond our reach. The "buy in" is too high. This is a bottom up approach. It implies a level of sophistication and knowledge on the part of the partners, but at the same time with a good program administrator who can advise, it is also a way to provide valuable marketing knowledge and shared risk.

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Megan Epler Wood

Location: Burlington, VT USA

Posted: Wed Nov 02, 2005 4:47 pm

In the study my firm did on the Business of Ecolodges we found that in fact there would be many, many ways to systematize assistance to ecolodges (and other SMEs certainly) in developing countries.

We need to move away from being so dependent on a just a very few pioneers to take the lead. What we have worked with in the past is undoubtedly that we have had to assist the pioneers - and hope they can move the process forward, but this model may now need to change.

With recommendations and systems like the one George references from Alberta, donors could begin to systematize assistance and with careful administration scale up our industry and support a wider variety of SMEs all at once. However, I would definitely avoid supporting NGOs to represent business myself. I find they are usually scrambling to just find the next grant assistance dollar - while at the same time projecting that they are representing business - when business is in fact not truly represented by these NGOs.

This is one of key barriers I believe to setting up more effective marketing mechanisms for ecotourism destinations - there are no business bodies that can begin to formulate better marketing strategies. And most of the SMEs are too small to do destination marketing on their own. And the tourism boards are far too large to represent SMEs.

In my recent experience in Chiapas, Mexico the government had an overwhelming amount of money and good will to help support marketing - but little understanding of real needs. They

were producing useless brochures that went out of date far too rapidly. Meanwhile the private sector was too busy and not even organized enough to capture the opportunity to get their information to Lonely Planet when they were recently doing the first new Chiapas edition in 10 years.

George Duffy

Location: Black Diamond, AB

Posted: Wed Nov 02, 2005 9:47 pm Post subject: Marketing

At the risk of seeming to hog this subject, it is something very close to me. Megan is dead right in not wanting NGOs to represent SME interests. For anyone not experienced in this, let me say that I have been a member of several member based destination marketing organizations (DMOs) because the premise seems so logical: we all pool our money and hire someone to go out and "market " for us. What happens in reality is that the some members benefit more than others for various reasons (like they have a better business), the association loses members and has to either raise rates or recruit new members. Soon enough, recruiting new members becomes the goal of the association, not marketing. This happens all the time.

What does work is when everyone in the same supply chain pools money, then they together stands to gain or lose. For example: I develop a tour using five lodges, a local guiding company, a local airline, a local bus company etc. We all contribute something, we all have a vested interest in making the program a success and we all will benefit proportionately. Once the plan is formulated if there were some dollars available to help ramp up the program, so much the better.

This is where a donor organization can play a good role. Not to be the marketing body or DMO. There is a lot of danger in giving marketing money to DMOs as Megan has also alluded.

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Nicole Haeusler

Posted: Sun Nov 06, 2005 9:33 am

I'd like to jump back to Jamie Sweeting's questions: How do we more effectively help grow these kinds of businesses? How do we encourage European and North American outbound eco/adventure (and for that matter Mass Tourism) operators to be more proactive in seeking out and supporting such SMEs and promoting those that are most committed to making a difference in the lives of local people and conservation?

We have here in Germany a well functioning Sustainable Tourism Tour Operators Cooperative, called "Forum Anders Reisen" (Forum of Different Travelling). This association promotes especially SMEs, CBT and environmentally friendly tours in the Internet (www.forumandersreisen.de) or at tourism fairs, like ITB in Berlin or Reisepavillon in Hanover where the members have a joint booth under the name of Forum Anders Reisen.

Forum Anders Reisen gets everyday plenty of – mostly badly made – folders or brochures of CBT-Projects including a cover letter which expresses the hope that some members of Forum

Anders Reisen will promote this project in their next program, catalogues etc. The CEO of Forum Anders Reisen, Rolf Pfeiffer, just recently told me that it is therefore not at all a problem for the members of Forum Anders Reisen to find interesting projects and initiatives – and they would be of course highly interested to promote them but “Who is controlling the quality of these initiatives and their products?” he asked me.

If an outbound tour operator in Europe or Northern America contacts these projects, the company normally wants a response within the next 24 hours – maybe even faster (problems with the bookings, canceling a tour etc.). And quite often these initiatives check their hotmail-account once a day or even only once a week.

If clients complain after the trip about the quality of the product (normally they do not do it during the trip, especially not while being in the community as they do not want to be impolite), the western based agency needs a local contact person who understands the problem and can help to solve it. In most of the cases this kind of contact person/institution does not exist.

Therefore I strongly recommend that SMEs and Communities should establish in each country or at least in their region an institution who markets all their products in a professional way. Additionally they have to employ highly professional staff who keeps always the contact between the projects and the international agencies and helps to solve problems in order to guaranty **the quality of the products**.

I am very much aware that it is not easy to set up such a national or regional umbrella organization but it can be highly effective. Most SMEs and Communities have to change their market strategy (if they even have one) - otherwise the whole idea of CBT, SMEs in Ecotourism etc might fail.

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Richard Edwards

Location: Seattle, Washington, USA

Posted: Fri Nov 04, 2005 4:40 am

Browsing around the forum I'm seeing quite a bit of discussion about certification and marketing sustainable/responsible/ecotourism. Most indicators I'm aware of point to the fact that consumers are not basing their travel decisions on these issues. The recently revitalized Adventure Travel Trade Association just finished work with Michigan State University reiterating consumer indifference to certification. TIES and George Washington U. had similar findings. And Megan mentions her own work, Sustainable Tourism Certification Marketing and its Contribution to SME Market Access, arriving at the same conclusion. Ron Mader says we're 20 years away from having certification being relevant. So what should we be emphasizing in our marketing in order to promote the type of business models we know are environmentally and socio-economically sound? My thought is that we need to keep the basics in mind and that means to show that we are able to meet a real or perceived consumer need.

Everywhere I've been up and down the supply chain in ecotourism/adventure travel, from a strictly economic point of view we have strived to create, operate and market environmentally sound products in order to enhance travelers' experiences and build the business through consumer satisfaction and referrals. But it's always been clear that those features don't sell travel up front. My view isn't that we should stop working toward a world where the environmental record of any business is relevant, but I do think that we need to focus our own marketing efforts, as well as any marketing assistance made available down through the supply chain, toward being relevant in the present. We have to answer the question of what consumers are looking for. We want to answer it with our knowledge of what the right answer is, but we still have to answer it.

I'd like to jump back up to Oliver's rhetorical question about technology being the answer. Technology can't do it all by itself, but as mentioned in the World Bank publication that Megan directed us to in her last post before the conference began, the Internet has the capacity for leveling the playing field. It already has to a certain extent in an economic sense for those SMEs that have been fortunate enough to have adequate technological capacity, or the ability and knowledge to develop that capacity. With a focused web-based marketing effort any SME can reach markets and compete with larger businesses.

What I've seen so many times over the last few years are SMEs and coops that may have even reached a certain level of competence in receiving visitors operationally, but their marketing never gains any focus. The efforts are dispersed across a number of channels and resources are diluted, basically nullifying market reach. For those SMEs who have been able to funnel their efforts and resources into a coherent Internet marketing strategy, there is definitely an enhanced ability to leverage marketing dollars.

Who should transfer this technology and how? If not NGOs, then who?

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Ron Mader

Location: Oaxaca, Mexico

Posted: Sun Nov 06, 2005 5:29 am Post subject: Beyond NGOs

"Who should transfer this technology and how? If not NGOs, then who?"

While there are may be some great things that NGOs do, marketing tourism is not one of them. For most groups, ecotourism is the 12th priority on a top ten list.

I do not see that TIES or Rainforest Alliance have contributed that much to a public dialogue, and while I do not wish to be overtly critical, if we wish NGOs to develop sustainable tourism, we should consider creating a new organization, or better yet consortium of multiple stakeholders.

To be fair, some NGOs do good work. What is missing, however, is communication when projects fail or offices close.

For those interested in pursuing a review of NGOs, please consult NGOs in Tourism and Conservation

http://www.planeta.com/ecotravel/tour/tourism_conservation.html

Meanwhile, I would emphasize in this topic a review of ethical marketing and ecotourism, another online dialogue hosted by Planeta.com

<http://www.planeta.com/ecotravel/tour/marketing.html>

The conference reviewed practical marketing strategies for ecotourism businesses and showed consumers how to make an informed choice. Certification was hotly debated as most travel operators saw little use for national or international programs.

<http://www.planeta.com/ecotravel/tour/marketingcert.html>

The dialogue fostered the development of a number of useful resources including a guide to online marketing, a profile of government tourism portals' coverage of ecotourism and a spotlight on related web resources.

<http://www.planeta.com/ecotravel/tour/marketingspot.html>

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George Duffy

Location: Black Diamond, AB

Posted: Sat Nov 05, 2005 11:04 am Post subject: Market Development

I'd like to reiterate the question of how do we reach and persuade that potentially large market of people who would buy more sustainably. I personally think this is a critical point because if you can answer this question accurately and precisely, we can start to make something like certification more useful from a marketing perspective.

Many years ago now Roger Lafrancios and Pam Wight published a really seminal bit of research on behalf of British Columbia and Alberta on the demand potential for ecotourism. And more recently in 2000 Paul Ray and Sherry Ruth Anderson published the Cultural Creatives book. Both indicate that the market is certainly there for our product. Id' like to know if any additional work has been done to carry this knowledge forward.

Both of these identify certain common attributes in habits; the ecotourism demand report showed higher than average interest in nature by memberships in conservation orgs and clubs as well as subscriptions to nature publications. The Cultural Creatives book identified a new psychographic cluster by their raised consciousness.

While this is intellectually interesting, when I approach almost anyone I meet with my product they are surprised, mostly enchanted or attracted to the idea, but they have never considered their vacation or travel purchase in the same way they consider vegetables, even if they would normally buy organic, as an example.

I have found that in general, it is not the organic vegetable buying consumer who is buying my product. It is people I would describe as active, curious, experienced travellers. Usually well educated. Most seem to be quite independent and individualistic. Hard as hell to pin into any sort of identifiable "target". Most are glad that I promote sustainable programs, but that is rarely the reason they take my trip. They have usually already chosen an activity and destination and we just happen to have the most suitable means of getting them the experience they seek. If we can do it more sustainably at a competitive price, so much the better. But if not, they will still go, whether we supply it or not.

To get back to my first paragraph, TIES has had a couple very nice but limited forays into this with the Travel Choice pamphlets. I thought these were very good as a start. Perhaps we need "someone" to mount a more sustained media campaign. TIES would be a logical choice. Perhaps others. Thoughts anyone?

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George Duffy

Location: Black Diamond, AB

Posted: Sun Nov 06, 2005 1:38 pm Post subject: Market Development

Okay, I am going to take a stab at this. There are two distinct markets for ecotourism: the basic travelers and the higher yield travelers.

The first are backpackers. They go anywhere, they seek everything and there is very little added value in their purchases. They do not for example seek the services of local guides because the only guide they need is Lonely Planet.

The second market is less monolithic, a series of core vertical segments made up of:

Wildlife watchers (the whole range: from twitchers to casually interested....)

Active travellers (hikers, paddlers etc.)

Plant people (gardening to mycology...)

History and civilization buffs (university/museum groups and independent travellers)

People seeking enlightenment (yoga, or shamanistic interests)

True Explorers (seeking really remote areas: arctic, rainforests)

Image Makers (photography, video enthusiasts)

Can we add more? Maybe thrill seekers?

And a secondary tier made up of:

Young Honeymooners (check Lapa Rios)

Dabblers - people wanting to stick their toe into the rainforest while on an otherwise conventional trip (I can sell them an Amazon or Pantanal as part of their overall trip of South America)

The product and market fit for CBT is backpackers. The type of product Nicole refers to is not sufficiently developed to be ready for any other market. Backpackers buy direct, not from tour operators and there are no sticky customer service issues to worry over when they come home. The marketing channels are well established through the various guide book and website referrals. Not to make light of this market, they have significant dollar power and sophisticated marketers like Australia have finely honed tactics to exploit the backpacker market.

Once a village/conservation area/ecolodge/guide service/transportation company/craft shop/museum or country advances or seeks to advance to a higher yielding clientele, as I think Guatemala is now trying to do, there is a very well oiled distribution channel starting with local inbound receptive operators.

They are the quality control gate keepers because next up on the food chain, international wholesalers and Nicole's Forum Anders Reisen, rely on their timely hands on experience and judgement to keep their customers (travel agents, group leaders and their individual clients) happy.

My challenge with all these various market segments is: making them aware of how their travel choice does make a difference and persuading them to make the right decision.

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Mike Robbins

Location: Toronto & Collingwood

Posted: Sun Nov 06, 2005 6:52 pm

I would like to draw people's attention to some very useful sources of good market research applicable to the ecotourism sector. There is a lot of good research out there that helps segment the markets by geography, psychographics and/or demographics as well as motivations and product or experience interests. The International Travel and Tourism Research Association focuses on tourism market research (techniques, application, results etc). This organization can be found at http://www.ttra.com/pub/162_637_2695.cfm

One very interesting and fairly current piece of research that sheds some light on markets interested in ecotourism product is the Geotourism market research completed by National Geographic Traveller in association with the US Travel Industry Association (TIA). The executive summary can be found at <http://www.tia.org/Pubs/GeotourismPhaseFinal.PDF> .

Several other useful sources of information that we often use are the Canadian Tourism Commission

<http://www.canadatourism.com/ctx/app/en/ca/publication.do?catId=home.catalog.publications.research> and the Ontario Ministry of Tourism

<http://www.tourism.gov.on.ca/english/tourdiv/research/reports.htm>

There is little in the way of ecotourism specific research but then there is really no such thing as an ecotourist. There are many market segments and subsegments that have an interest in

ecotourism product but they are not typically motivated by the fact that a product is an ecotourism product. They are more often motivated by an activity, a destination or an overall experience. They may be interested in buying or booking product components that are more sustainable than the norm. This is how the Australian Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program (NEAP) works so well – the NEAP symbol allows consumers to make an informed choice to select a more sustainable operator or product in the destination they are looking at or for the activity they are seeking.

Megan Epler Wood

Location: Burlington, VT USA

Posted: Sat Nov 05, 2005 3:41 pm

I have to strongly recommend another reference which is Harvey Hartman, *Marketing in the Soul Age* and *Reflections of a Cultural Brand*. He researches the market for sustainability products - largely organic foods.

Here is a key quote of his - which I am cutting pasting from my paper on markets for certification.

Sustainable products market research expert Harvey Hartman stated in 2004 that consumer research, “mechanically ties consumer behavior to consumer attitudes,” and that “we cannot quite shed the belief that consumers act merely on their convictions, despite the large and growing body of evidence to the contrary (Hartman & Hartman Group, 2003: pg 44-45).

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All other commercial product categories find the psychographic drivers that get people to buy their products. We must use these techniques! As promoters of green and sustainability products, we have never gotten very serious about this. It is entirely possible to do more excellent studies of what are the market drivers for ecotourism. But it has never been done.

I stood in my rural driveway last night under the stars explaining to new neighbors about how Mars is so close and the waterfowl migration is underway... and they were transfixed. The next thing I saw they were bringing out binoculars and their kids to look at the night sky with fascination.

I can only guess what truly motivates our market, but after years of studying the data - and I want to keep studying this - it is the fact that our industry offers unprecedented opportunities to learn in a relaxed way - using highly professional local guides. This is the value added that makes our industry tick. I have had industry people tell me over and over that it is their guides that are the key value added in their businesses. And if that is so, then we need to get behind this and market ourselves with this in mind.

As most of us know, to market effectively we have to understand what is the core market, what drives them, what distinguishes our products, and then create the message that grabs them, and

use the best most cost effective communication methods possible to reach them, and **be consistent.**

We cannot start with hoping to convince our market of something. That is indeed appropriate for NGOs to do - to seek to change attitudes - but for real marketing I think we have to get more serious and soon.

Richard Edwards

Location: Seattle, Washington, USA

Posted: Sat Nov 05, 2005 9:52 pm

Hartman's service is exciting and powerful, but hiring him or really any broad ranging research like his is probably too much of a financial burden for any one company in this industry to bear, and that wouldn't help the overall cause. However, an organized group of suppliers and/or sellers could access enough funds, or a competent NGO could certainly begin the journey of getting a better picture of who our market is and what will motivate them.

Up to now, all of the companies that I've been involved with or known well in this relatively tiny sector have been very preoccupied with the competition. When they think of the competition, they are thinking of other companies that are very much like them. Our real competition is mass tourism. There are plenty of clients for everyone in sustainable/ecotourism, and the low hanging fruit we are not picking is out there buying green-washed products because we don't know how to differentiate ourselves in a way that speaks to more people.

We've never been able to pick our clients out of a crowd, but consumer research that is well-supported economically and intellectually is a next logical step toward that ability. TIES may be a good choice to head this up, but the funding required will be substantial enough that more organizations with deeper pockets (or access to deep pockets) would have to be involved. Rainforest Alliance comes to mind, especially since they're already doing good work in-country with their sustainable tourism program.

The industry has been complacent and fractured to this point. Ecotourism products are created and a certain market appears. We think we can explain some of it. "It's about the guides" is indeed a common thread, and there are other bits and pieces we think we have a handle on, but I haven't met anyone yet who can profile an ecotourism client any more specifically than George did earlier.

If there is someone who can, or has a thought on it, we would love to hear from you.

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Ron Mader

Location: Oaxaca, Mexico

Posted: Mon Nov 07, 2005 8:50 am Post subject: A word about guidebooks

A word about guidebooks. In the Triple Bottom Line Business Structures and Strategies topic we heard:

"I feel the Costa Rican government sustainability program (ICT Certification of Sustainable Tourism) does not provide a useful categorization and is misleading. So in my travels I have turned to 'The New Key' to provide information on ecolodges in Costa Rica."

In the Marketing and Market Development topic we heard:

"In my recent experience in Chiapas, the government had an overwhelming amount of money and good will to help support marketing - but little understanding of real needs. They were producing useless brochures that went out of date far too rapidly. Meanwhile the private sector was too busy and not even organized enough to capture the opportunity to get their information to Lonely Planet when they were recently doing the first new Chiapas edition in 10 years."

One of the most popular conferences hosted on Planeta was Media, the Environment and Tourism in which a number of guidebook writers participated. Most complained that they themselves were poorly paid and respected by their publishers and for the most part, local officials and businesses did not know how to make effective contact. Details

>> <http://www.planeta.com/ecotravel/period/metevent.html>

As a guidebook writer myself (as well as web publisher and columnist), I know first-hand the challenge of writing a book of use to the eco traveler. I also am well aware there is a limited market. My guidebook Mexico: Adventures in Nature never got beyond a first edition.

I would like to repeat one of the proposals made during the MET Conference -- we need to see roundtable discussions of media, tourism businesses, officials and other stakeholders that do not have a predefined agenda other than improving communication and problem solving.

What does media not need? Ill-designed fam trips, poor media releases or long response times to urgent questions.

The difficulty I see in Chiapas, for example, is not that the ecotourism contractors could not make contact with the author during the 2-week window of his visit, but that information about ecotourism programs was not more accessible on the Web in a manner that would have prompted dialogue and interest long before his physical visit.

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<http://www.planeta.com/ecotravel/period/meteventsum1.html>

The Coverage of Place - Ron Mader/Rhodes Journalism Review

<http://www.rjr.ru.ac.za/archive/rjr21/stories/ecotourism.html>

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Goodness Sells - Frances Figart
<http://www.planeta.com/planeta/05/0509goodness.html>

Neel Inamdar

Posted: Mon Nov 07, 2005 12:21 pm Post subject: Time for an Alliance?

It strikes me that the gaps identified call for some kind of industry driven alliance. Not a simply Destination Management Organization, but an industry driven alliance.

As one of the participants observed, its time to move beyond the "pioneers" stage. As with any industry's growth, different stages call for different strategies. I would argue that this field is past the "inception" phase - and is into the "growth" phase. Some might argue we are into the "Mature" phase.

The industry has become increasingly competitive, consumers increasingly discerning and with greater choice. The internet provides both risks and opportunities, and a number of the major players from the mass market are eyeing this sector for growth. I would say participants need to work together if they are to succeed.

Whether we are in the growth or mature phase (I'll let someone else decide that), tactics need to change. Improved consumer knowledge, customer service, management, sales, promotion etc are all key. Will we see consolidation? Probably.

This alliance would be responsible for obtaining the research mentioned (see also linkages with the LOHAS group) on consumers. It would also look for ways to more effectively market services and products.

Is it not time we spent as much time collaboratively marketing* efforts as we do working with consumers and communities?

Many of us have been in this industry many, many years, and perhaps its time to change our approach. I have been fortunate to have been in the mass market as well as the "ecotourism" market, on both the private sector side, and the NGO side, and both have strengths and weaknesses.

An alliance would have to aim to build on the strengths of the participants.

*"Marketing" is used to reflect the full range of marketing efforts - from consumer research to PR to sales and promotion and customer service.

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Megan Epler Wood

Location: Burlington, VT USA

Posted: Mon Nov 07, 2005 5:01 pm

I am picking up on a number of themes here that deal with how our ecotourism development efforts can grow more effectively.

1. On the community development side, I think that good quality local representation is really required in order to make communities effective players in the landscape of ecotourism development. The market for community-based ecotourism is not necessarily backpackers in my view . But it will be backpackers unless there is effective, community-private sector partnerships to make these projects meet quality standards in the long term. I think developing private sector/community alliances is key. These alliances could also handle marketing. This is the solution I recommended during my work in Chiapas, and despite years of conflict in that region, I was amazed how quickly the project was embraced. Local tour operators needed community alliances to make their projects work and the communities needed the local tour operators. In this case, infrastructure in Chiapas is already in place so this was not the problem it can be. So I do believe that donors need to focus on funding community private sector alliances in order to move projects forward.

2. What we have frankly not seen to date in the ecotourism world are effective business alliances. And this is another powerful area for donor support. Some may question why donors should support business alliances, but my argument is that our industry is still emerging for many reasons having to do with the need to make it ecologically and socially very responsible - and that for this reason marketing and business networks have not taken off to date. If such alliances can be tied to developing more community projects, that could be especially effective in my view - as we need to provide incentives for business to work with communities and we need to also offer technical assistance to make certain it is done with appropriate technical expertise.

I also find that financing high quality market research - which we still lack in our field after all this time - might be best done at the regional level. As most of you know, there are few if any good statistics on ecotourism travel at the national or destination level. I convinced my project leader in Ecuador to allow us to do such research for indigenous tourism in Ecuador. The results were excellent and I think every project should consider having such research as the basis for beginning to consider what markets they are seeking to reach. But it is not really that useful at the international level I don't think.

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George Duffy

Location: Black Diamond, AB

Posted: Mon Nov 07, 2005 7:57 pm Post subject: Alliances

Neel and Megan, can you give an example or two of what you mean by business alliance?

Richard Edwards

Location: Seattle, Washington, USA

Posted: Tue Nov 08, 2005 1:25 am

Megan, I'm also going to ask for some clarification. As mentioned earlier, it is difficult, if not impossible, to pick our mid- to upper-scale, mostly North American buyers of international ecotourism packages out of a crowd. But we know that once we've reached them and provided them with the kind of experience they are not likely to get with a mass tourism provider, both in terms of the sales/service, as well as that comparatively authentic travel experience to an environmentally and/or culturally enriching destination, they do book future trips to a wide variety of destinations with us, looking for similarly authentic experiences. If we don't happen to cover their next destination, they almost invariably take our advice on another travel provider who offers similar services.

All of this tells me two things: 1) That while not every destination is the same, there is substantial overlap in the kind of information most destinations need to properly market to the segment that can be persuaded to travel in our style; 2) Once we've gotten some handle on some key factors necessary to reach the right segment(s) and are able to do that, we could have tremendous influence on an exponential number of travel purchasing decisions. Each destination or region undertaking a new market study might end up reinventing most of the wheel each time.

What Mike said resonated with me-

Mike wrote: There is little in the way of ecotourism specific research but then there is really no such thing as an ecotourist. There are many market segments and subsegments that have an interest in ecotourism product but they are not typically motivated by the fact that a product is an ecotourism product. They are more often motivated by an activity, a destination or an overall experience.

Could you expand on your view that research should be destination specific?

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Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Tue Nov 08, 2005 1:28 am

During the past 2 years here in Palawan, we tried identifying the markets for proposed ecotourism products, and we dealt a lot with what participants here called the psychographical aspects of decision making. The conclusion was that decisions were surely not made rationally or even logically, with a list of criteria on the side being checked on... When we interviewed over 500 tourists in Palawan, the vast majority did NOT make decisions primarily based on values, sustainability or a key word like ecotourism. Most important were destination (they were looking for interesting places in a certain region already decided on), price for sure, and availability of information on their usual media (the guidebooks came after the destination was already decided on). In addition, many even mentioned "instinct" or plainly confessed not being sure what made them decide...

There's another aspect of marketing that became essential to me - very often, you are not trying to identify characteristics of a certain kind of consumer ("ecotourism" or "mass tourism") but trying to sell a product or a destination with all it's got, twisting products towards greater sustainability. In this case, since we often do not have the means to look for and raise new markets, the question is more how to sell new products to already existing markets - and their distributors. This is why I quite like the idea of learning from the marketing successes of traditional and "mass" tourism.

This links to Nicole's insight on the main issue raised by Rolf Pfeiffer of the Forum Anderes Reisen: what they (distributors at originating countries) need to sell those interesting products is an assurance on who is controlling the quality of these initiatives and their products. That "who" is, of course, a person backed by an institution (a corporation). In my ventures into traditional tourism distribution (via operators, wholesalers and agents), the question of trust is sooo important. I called it a Mafia and was frustrated by its relative closedness, but I also learned why. Mostly, what is sold is well known, and has been for a couple of years. That 5-day, 4-night stay at a resort in Portugal may not be the most exciting thing, but they know it works and won't let them down. What we need in ecotourism (and might learn from traditional tourism) are brands that consistently manage their quality and stay on the course. Franchising, BO (and systems to select and train the one we T to) schemes, mainstreaming ecotourism through links with larger operators, serious market research - I look forward to more professionalism and management capacity. How to bring this to our ecotourism destination?

Richard Edwards

Location: Seattle, Washington, USA

Posted: Tue Nov 08, 2005 2:51 am Post subject: Weekly recap

This week there was discussion of the role of certification in the marketing of tourism. Some participants support the idea that certification could be a motor for further spreading the word about responsible travel choices and convincing travelers to choose sustainably/responsibly. Several participants disagree about the pertinence and short-term potential of certification at this point in time, except possibly in B-to-B marketing.

We've also looked a bit at how to subsidize new projects that promote the needs and interests of local people so that their ecotourism products can reach a certain level of maturity and compete in the marketplace, while maintaining the integrity of local ecosystems and cultures.

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Others, specifically those working directly in assisting with small, rural SMEs in developing countries are asking the forum for some practical answers on how to help those SMEs reach the market, present their products, and bring buyers (including wholesalers and direct consumers) and sellers together. Jamie said:

jsweeting wrote: My principle interest here is to see how we can use markets (both direct to the consumer and within the supply chain) to increase competitiveness and profitability of tourism SMEs working in high biodiversity areas. The more successful SMEs are the more people they can employ and the greater likelihood for getting local communities to support conservation -- because they see more economic benefit from protection than destructive utilization.

How do we more effectively help grow these kinds of businesses? How do we encourage European and North American outbound eco/adventure (and for that matter Mass Tourism) operators to be more proactive in seeking out and supporting such SMEs and promoting those that are most committed to making a difference in the lives of local people and conservation?

We have yet to really present many solutions here that would allow the bridging of this gap. The one consensus that we seem to be moving toward is that there is a need for leadership from an institution, whether it is a business alliance or an NGO that will: help to educate consumer travelers in order to reach those who will purchase ecotourism products if given the proper information to make distinctions; have the capacity and means to educate wholesalers and other enterprises involved in reselling ecotourism products on the short and long term profitability of "going sustainable"; reach out to local communities in a meaningful and practical way to provide them the assistance they need to access potential markets.

Peter Lugnegard

Location: Skellefteå, northern Sweden

Posted: Tue Nov 08, 2005 4:36 am Post subject: Getting marketing to roll our way

Well this is not an easy discussion to enter. I'll start just telling you what happens in my northern European corner of the world.

- Operators have long been irritated of non serious competition.
- Market demand for packaged nature experiences of a good class is growing
- Travel agents state that Northern Europe is hard to access due to lack of easy-to-buy packages.
- In this situation the Swedish label Nature's Best has developed, an NGO initiative with public funding assisting operators to deliver "Fun travel in nature with a guarantee for quality". The NGO only markets the label, not the trips. Operators use the label through ordinary market channels.
- Government and commercial sponsors assist in marketing because they like the image it gives to the area and because there is a demand. Basically the label NB stimulates people going north to an area they do not know well enough to make a good choice on their own.
- Nature's Best also establishes a base for packaging, since it is product based.

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These experiences have been valuable for a soon finished 3 year project called SMART (Sustainable Model for Arctic Regional Tourism, www.arctictourism.net) with partners around the Arctic and for the formation of the Sustainable Arctic Tourism Association with the goal of developing a certification system for the Arctic.

So I have a positive experience of certification/labelling with a heavy market focus. It is not easy to put a label in the hands of travel agents but it is a necessary process. Some actors say that there are dozens of eco labels on the European market, so one more makes no difference. The fact is that no label in Europe except Nature's Best certifies products based on activities (i. e. wildlife watching, hiking, canoeing, river rafting). And company interest is growing!!

Neel Inamdar

Posted: Tue Nov 08, 2005 8:19 am Post subject: Re: Getting marketing to roll our way some great stuff here. I'll try to pick up on the different items:

I was a part of the "mafia" that Oliver refers to for many years (!). One thing that needs to be stressed are the decision making criteria from the consumer's perspective. "Eco" is seldom at the top of the list. Value (which is a function of price / quality), word of mouth / reputation, accessibility and a host of other factors come to play - if it happens to be "eco", well, that's great.

But, crucial to all this is what is being referred to as "market access". This means, in short, getting into bed with the mafia so that the products are brochured and marketed in source countries through channels consumers know and trust. Yes, the internet is changing things, in some areas faster than others, but it cannot replace some of the service providers in many destinations, esp. remote, inaccessible ones.

Peter wrote: So I have a positive experience of certification/labelling with a heavy market focus. It is not easy to put a label in the hands of travel agents but it is a necessary process.

Peter's comments are important - they included "a heavy market focus". In short, they created a brand with attributes, which, I would argue, is what this industry needs to grow (and they put it into the hands of travel agents). Whether this brand is at a national, regional or international level remains to be seen.

To respond to the comment on alliances, I would consider some kind of a trade alliance for the industry with a very clear market driven agenda. There are many synergies to be had, but it needs to be driven by industry, NOT by NGOs. I would be very wary about taking donor funds except for specific activities the organization has identified, or else it will end up being "just another NGO".

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Carol Patterson

Location: Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Posted: Tue Nov 08, 2005 9:12 am Post subject: Market development

I believe the discussion so far presents a pretty accurate picture of what is needed for successful market development. With ecotourism and nature-based tourism dominated by small and medium-size businesses I think governments can and should play an important role in developing markets. The 4 – 6 years required to reach breakeven or develop new markets are difficult to finance; in situations where the government has provided marketing funds (using

well-crafted participation criteria) it can make a huge difference. George mentioned how Alberta has developed such a program. Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency has also undertaken similar projects where they have brought together experienced outdoor tourism operators to pool their marketing resources (along with a substantial ACOA contribution) over a 3 year period. The projects have been successful because they provide continuity over an extended period of time and their screening process has helped create stable partnerships among like-minded business owners.

While these programs may seem 'expensive' to decision makers (and lack the quick feedback cycle a study can provide), their price tags are an honest valuation of the investment needed to develop ecotourism's full potential.

Megan Epler Wood

Location: Burlington, VT USA

Posted: Tue Nov 08, 2005 11:10 am

1. What is a business alliance? Well, I must admit this could be defined in a number of ways, and I am looking for the most effective type of alliance to work with myself. There are many business alliances of course that are defined strictly by the effort to cooperatively market their products. Even the huge franchise chains essentially are doing this. But on a smaller scale we have the idea of alliances that market a certain category of goods in a destination like the "Quality Inns of Costa Rica" or "The Finest Camps in Kenya" - these groups exist but I am paraphrasing their names. At the destination level, it seems to me ecotourism marketing could be much more effectively marketed via this type of business alliance which provides reservation service and marketing - and in my view could add other services as well to the business alliance members, such as training and CSR reporting. There are of course the larger ideas of business alliances at a national or international level that take care of big needs like market research and incorporate effective sales teams that represent the alliance members for a fee. Any of these more business like schemes are very needed in my view in ecotourism.

2. On the question of market research and can we identify the ecotourism market. Using psychographic research and the powerful tools this implies, I am absolutely confident we could identify a market for ecotourism. I actually disagree that there is not a defined market for this. As Hartman points out, most consumers don't fit into neat and tidy segments as they have complex lifestyles that compel them to engage in patterns of consumption that are contradictory and difficult to predict. Demographics don't tell us anything about how consumers live. Businesses need to adapt to a dynamically changing marketplace. If we abandon the ecotourism category - which is increasingly recognized around the world - I submit we are making a real mistake. After 15 years of promoting the ecotourism concept and label I have personally never encountered so much recognition of the concept in the general marketplace. What I do not find is an understanding how to buy ecotourism. Consumers are completely confused about this. And we are heading into the biggest market opportunity ever right now, with the retirement of the baby boomers in the U.S., Japan and Europe.

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In my opinion, what we have to do is find out what makes the buyer interested in this category and do some more sophisticated analysis on how to attract more buyers to this category and use the significant name recognition that has been built for the ecotourism category and really build it. If you compare ecotourism for example with sustainable tourism or pro-poor tourism as valid as these terms are, they have very little market recognition at all, while ecotourism does. I would hate to see this progress abandoned now.

George Duffy

Location: Black Diamond, AB

Posted: Tue Nov 08, 2005 5:53 pm Post subject: Marketing

1. In the evolution of trying to make ecotourism so holistic I think we have nearly gone too far. We are in danger of diluting any value of the word as it has now created hyphenated offspring. We no longer just have ecotourism, but we have community ecotourism and we have rural ecotourism and urban ecotourism. Ironically, to define what I think was the original meaning intended we'd have call it nature ecotourism.

2. The general public has no such problem. At travel shows when I meet a broad swath of people, because my company brand is Worldwide Ecolodges, I get asked "what are ecolodges"? I ask back, what do you think they are? They answer with a question, "Are they nature lodges that are more environmental?" Yup, more or less. It's not complicated to them.

3. I really like the Nature's Best concept as I think it connotes pretty much what Megan is saying we need, which is a readily identifiable brand. I am not a big fan of certification, but in order to create some kind of positioning in the market, I think Nature's Best is workable. I was in Brazil a few years ago participating in this type of discussion and I suggested that what would be more useful for them would be to create a Genuine Brazil label or something like it to keep the product and message pure. I don't know if Costa Rica still uses the No Artificial Ingredients slogan, but that is quite brilliant. Costa Rica has been able to almost single handedly become positioned as The Ecotourism Country, like it or not.

4. What I'd really like to see us do is take back ownership of the word ecotourism, use it proudly and make it our own. I totally appreciate what small communities are trying to do, what proponents of sustainable tourism are trying to do, but we have a chance here to actually build on a general public perception of ecotourism as a nature based type of travel that has added values. I know a lot of operators have shunned the eco word because they are afraid of being associated with some of the more radical elements of the environmental movement. So be it.

5. Fear of greenwashing is paralyzing us. This is mostly a family fight. The public is not as sensitive to this as we are, so far. If we have a strong brand, things will start to sort themselves out.

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Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Wed Nov 09, 2005 12:29 am
Subject: Web based Marketing
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I'd like to get back to a topic regarding the Internet and if it is a leveling agent for ecotourism marketing, i.e. on the Web bigger and smaller players have more or less the same chances and competition can be more based on actual performance and quality standards. I had made a point that technology in itself is not sufficient, let me qualify this.

Having developed 3 websites somehow linked to sustainable tourism (at CI, for UNEP and for SEMP-NP in the Philippines), my experience is that, unfortunately, the Web ends up not being as fair to smaller players (say, SMEs) as we'd like it to. It's true that for something like US\$ 300 (at least here in the Philippines) you can actually set up a relatively good website today (a great business card for your product, so to speak), and you can make it quite adequate to your prospective clients if you take the time to really get involved and involve all your staff and partners (the idea that someone from outside can do it for you actually does not work - no webmaster can read your mind. You've got to stay there managing development at every step, spending a lot of your time and mental energy). For a bit more you can even get secure payment systems, reservations, the works (in fact, these technologies are quite widespread today). Still, how do you get it to be your real distribution channel, i.e., to sell your product like hot pretzels?

What counts for increasing the chances of selling is views, hits, downloads and links. Lots of people have to see it everyday and think it's cool. For this, as an SME, or even for a start-up DMO, you need to hire someone who is updated on the latest technologies, continuously updates your metatags, pursues all possible links and partnerships (ahh, how it's difficult to negotiate links to the sites that REALLY get millions of viewers/week), debug your site all the time - which SME/junior DMO has the resources to pay for this? Mind you, this is fixed regular payroll, not technology transfer. You also need to cross-reference your site in all major media that your potential clients read: magazines, portals, newspapers, travel guides, even TV programs. Again, how can you do this if you have only 20-50 rooms to sell?

The reason we see so many mergers and acquisitions between travel sites and other providers/portals is this - traffic. The challenge for Web-based ecotourism marketing is therefore the same, how to get more traffic to our cool websites - without the benefit of large financing and technology exchange.

Yes, I guess one of the answers is cooperativeness and associativism, establishing networks of SMEs bound together in a DMO and supported by some degree of subsidy (government or agency). Does anyone have a good example of efficient web-based marketing of an ecotourism business?

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Mike Robbins

Location: Toronto & Collingwood

Posted: Wed Nov 09, 2005 12:34 pm

Oliver asked:

"Does anyone have a good example of efficient web-based marketing of an ecotourism business?"

A colleague of ours, Todd Lucier owns and runs an ecolodge on the edge of Algonquin Provincial Park. His web site is particularly effective – you can find it at www.algonquinparkecolodge.com .

My business partner Jill Vandal along with Todd Lucier recently prepared a manual for web based marketing. The manual has been tested and refined with input from a broad range of tourism business owners and managers who attended workshops conducted throughout Northern Ontario in 2005. The audience is tourism business owners in general but the manual is particularly relevant to small scale and remote operators. You can actually download a copy of the manual from www.tourismkeys.ca

Megan Epler Wood

Location: Burlington, VT USA

Posted: Wed Nov 09, 2005 4:32 pm

I was the one to oversee the launch of ecotourism.org for The Ecotourism Society. Granted this was early, early in the days of ecotourism marketing. I remember racing to get that address, realizing how valuable that would be in about 1995. I also was the one to come up with the *Your Travel Choice Makes a Difference Campaign* and raise the original funding for this, launch it on the web, and get all of the tour operators and TIES members to list their companies as part of this campaign.

The Travel Choice campaign was designed to have much more than a website at launch. We had brochures and 3 advertorials in Natural History Magazine as well to launch the campaign, and we did a significant number of press releases, and perhaps as many as 30-40 interviews on the topic. We designed this to get the press off the constant question of how ecotourism might harm the environment, and rather ask how the consumer can make a difference. It really, really worked.

Both of these efforts were very well received and changed the face of how The International Ecotourism Society was viewed - and created enormous new visibility for the organization. I can assure you that having funds and having lots of staff time were not the reason we succeeded. I believe the TIES website remains number one in terms of ecotourism hits - though Ron may disagree on this..... And the Travel Choice campaign is still quite active - though I am not sure how well it functions as a tool for providing members with new clients.

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In both cases, the key to our success was public relations. We received a tremendous amount of media interest and we fostered this actively. Stanley Selengut of Maho Bay Camps was the king

of public relations and still is today and he always was proud to say that he only paid for one advertisement a year in Wedding Magazine I believe. I have always tried to position my projects - and this relates to the importance of market positioning for any project but particularly ecotourism. I believe we could look at every case of successful ecotourism projects and find that the web is just reinforcing what is being said in the media and that it is the market positioning that counts, backed up by smart media relations.

Richard Edwards

Location: Seattle, Washington, USA

Posted: Wed Nov 09, 2005 4:58 pm

Oliver, Hans Pfister of Cayuga does a great job with his web marketing for both Lapa Rios and Morgan's Rock:

<http://www.laparios.com>

<http://www.morgansrock.com>

I've assisted much smaller family-owned businesses in having good success including:

<http://www.bosquedepaz.com>

I also humbly submit our own site: <http://www.wildland.com/>

We generate the vast majority of our new business leads through our site, a situation I know to be the case with a vast majority of wholesalers, and we are much smaller than nearly all of our competitors. We don't have an SEO or SEM person on staff. I have trained myself on this, I'm the only one working on it, and web marketing takes about 20-30% of work time. Over the last year our traffic has increased 80% over previous years, though the site has been a constant presence and source of referrals for 10 years. Instructions on how to replicate that learning process for other businesses does qualify as technology transfer. It can be done!

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Antonio Suarez

Location: MEXICO

Posted: Thu Nov 10, 2005 12:45 am Post subject: Questions about web marketing

I am trying to find out if ecotourism web masters are now the equivalent to those nice hostesses you find at the hotels entrance giving the tourist certain confidence, like telling them that right at that place where they have just arrived are people who can understand them.

What are the requirements to have a successfully internet marketing whether you are a consultant or an operator?

Is it better to have some one full time doing so?

Is there a tendency having better results if he or she is an American, European or at least an English native speaker?

Which are the best sites that reveal good internet marketing?

I would like to receive opinions about our site: www.balam.org.mx

Ron Mader

Location: Oaxaca, Mexico

Posted: Thu Nov 10, 2005 5:59 am Post subject: Reciprocity

Let me break my response into the following rambles: web marketing, individual companies, online and offline marketing and the value of communication and later in a separate post, awards.

WEB MARKETING

If we want to talk about making the most of effective web marketing, my thinking is that we need 1) better national tourism portals and 2) support of independent websites that feature ecotourism.

FYI, As part of this exercise, I am updating the Web Survey of Ecotourism
<http://www.planeta.com/ecotravel/tour/webeco.html>

In Triple Bottom Line, Toby said:

"Ron said that national tourism websites rarely mention ecotourism. My experience at the grassroots level has been just the opposite, where every tourism operator labels its products as ecotourism!"

Let's use the Honduras website as an example

<http://www.letsgehonduras.com>

How easy is it to find details about 'ecotourism,' 'rafting' or 'birding?' How does one search for a specific company, say Rios Tropicales or the Lodge at Pico Bonito?

On the plus side, Letsgehonduras.com is a beautiful visual design and good information, but very little for the independent traveler or travel agent seeking details about specific options.

I don't mean to pick on Honduras. Most countries' national tourism portals do a poor job. I spoke to one operator this week who said, 'It's not just the web. The national tourism ministry does not do anything to promote our operations. But we've learned not to expect anything from the national tourism ministry, so we are not disappointed.'

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INDIVIDUAL COMPANIES

Oliver asked: " Does anyone have a good example of efficient web-based marketing of an ecotourism business?"

The site I refer everyone to is Costa Rica Expeditions, a featured (aka certified) operator on Planeta's World Travel Directory

<http://www.planeta.com/worldtravel.html>

What Costa Rica Expeditions -- <http://www.costaricaexpeditions.com> -- does well is keep its info updated and focuses on the work-at-hand: selling tours. How many operator websites make you go through 5 clicks before you find what they actually sell?

For more examples or better yet, a way of figuring out what web-based marketing means to you, I offer a 1-week online seminar

<http://www.planeta.com/seminars/mtw.html>

Febo asked: "What are the requirements to have a successfully internet marketing whether you are a consultant or an operator? Is there a tendency having better results if he or she is an American, European or at least an English native speaker?"

English is a must if the clientele is English-speaking. As to marketing, there are plenty of experts in Mexico and Latin America.

Febo asked: "I would like to receive opinions about our site: <http://www.balam.org.mx> "

My question about this -- and most other sites -- would start with 'how often is this updated and how comfortable are you personally in getting the update?'

Personal review (please take my critique with a grain of salt)

- 1) I don't like the flash screen intro -- too last century
- 2) Espanol on <http://www.balam.org.mx/principal2.html> is featured as a Mexican flag. Pet peeve here, but never use national flags to indicate language. It's more exclusive than helpful
- 3) From the page -- <http://www.balam.org.mx/principal2.html> -- the link to Editorial is dead
- 4) Completed projects -- <http://www.balam.org.mx/proyectos2.html> -- is quite impressive, but how does a traveler visit these projects?

Key word: Reciprocity

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ONLINE AND OFFLINE MARKETING AND THE VALUE OF COMMUNICATION

I would stress (as I have done for the past 10 years) that what we need to focus on is improving communication. Without that, marketing is a bust. We also need to improve communication online AND offline.

Ten years ago I visited a small community operator in Creel, Chihuahua, home of the Copper Canyon. Nice folks and I made my trip, but what struck me was that the signage for the company was on the inside of the door that led to the street. This meant that when the door was closed, visitors had no idea there was a tour company there.

Improper and inadequate signage is one of my pet peeves. It makes no sense to me to talk about the wonders of the Internet and web marketing if operators don't understand how important it is to let people know how to find them once they arrive.

Here in Oaxaca I have seen several businesses move to new locations without informing people they had moved. There seems to be a faith in the mind-reading ability of travelers who have all the time in the world to play hide-and-seek. Sadly, the operations that cannot be found go out of business.

Let me repeat what I said at the 1996 Coloquio Internacional sobre Ecoturismo: "Simply put, people won't go to parks if they don't know they exist. Information is needed to ensure accountability of the management and financing of protected areas."

<http://www.planeta.com/ecotravel/mexico/1096/info.html>

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Ron Mader

Location: Oaxaca, Mexico

Posted: Thu Nov 10, 2005 6:02 am Post subject: Web Popularity

Megan wrote

"I believe the TIES website remains number one in terms of ecotourism hits - though Ron may disagree on this"

Let's see

Google Search

<http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&edition=us&q=ecotourism>

<http://www.google.com/search?hl=es&edition=us&q=ecoturismo>

Alexa Search

http://www.alexa.com/data/details/traffic_details?q=&url=www.planeta.com

http://www.alexa.com/data/details/traffic_details?q=&url=www.ecotourism.org

And as a reference

<http://www.planeta.com/web/webpopularity.html>

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Ron Mader

Location: Oaxaca, Mexico

Posted: Thu Nov 10, 2005 7:27 am Post subject: A few words about awards

Acknowledging best practices in tourism ecotourism is still evolving. Leaders who attempt to work in an ethical and ecological fashion do so not necessarily for the recognition, but appreciate the kudos given by their peers.

Awards often play a greater role in raising awareness than certification. What's most interesting is that the award tends to "certify" the recipient AND the donor. "How green is that lodge? It won x-award." "How green is that organization? It gives the x-award."

I have a personal interest in awards as I have been a recipient, a judge and grantor. Planeta.com presents an annual ecotourism award called the Colibri (or Hummingbird).
<http://www.planeta.com/colibri.html>

Just brainstorming, but maybe it's time to present or co-sponsor a new award with the goal of creating an incentive for communication.

For example, would there be interest in best government web portal featuring ecotourism? That could function as an incentive for tourism ministries to improve their own websites.

What about an award for best NGO web portal for its coverage of its ecotourism?

Details would have be worked out. This would not have to be costly if there is good will. Rough ideas are sketched out online
<http://www.planeta.com/ecotravel/tour/awards.html>

Megan Epler Wood

Location: Burlington, VT USA

Posted: Thu Nov 10, 2005 9:18 am

I took the Planeta.com course on web use and it did include very helpful items like this on tracking web traffic.

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Richard Edwards

Location: Seattle, Washington, USA

Posted: Thu Nov 10, 2005 11:52 am

Alexa isn't always accurate, but it will give us some comparative ideas of how the industry sites are doing. I would like to add one point that has been true for every site I've been responsible for, and that is that we don't get traffic from other sites. The only statistically significant traffic is from the search engines. There are two exceptions to that right now with wildland.com (with Planeta.com actually being one of those two), but that traffic still pales completely in the face of the search engine traffic. And most sites do have a couple of sites they are linked to that help drive traffic a bit.

The way to see who is succeeding at the search engine game is to go to Google and type in the top 5 terms you are pretty sure people would use to find your business and look at the 2 or 3 sites that keep popping up in the top 5-10 of those results.

Ron Mader

Location: Oaxaca, Mexico

Posted: Fri Nov 11, 2005 6:59 am Post subject: Transitions Abroad

If you want to see a popular website about responsible travel, check out Transitions Abroad

<http://www.transitionsabroad.com>

http://www.alexa.com/data/details/traffic_details?q=&url=www.transitionsabroad.com

Disclosure -- I am the editor of their ecotourism and Latin America sections. The current Nov/Dec issue features my selection of resources.

What I see on Planeta.com. is that the only people looking at 'ecotourism' or 'sustainable tourism' are students and consultants. The larger crowd are travelers planning their vacations, sometimes a year in advance, and seeking to learn as much as possible about a specific place.

Ron Mader

Location: Oaxaca, Mexico

Posted: Fri Nov 11, 2005 7:37 am Post subject: How to avoid being roadkill on the information highway

Oliver wrote

"Having developed 3 websites somehow linked to sustainable tourism (at CI, for UNEP and for SEMP-NP in the Philippines), my experience is that, unfortunately, the Web ends up not being as fair to smaller players (say, SMEs) as we'd like it to."

I would disagree that the web is not fair to small players. But for it to work, the SMEs and communities must want to communicate. And that's not always the case. Training is needed not only in 'how to build a website' but 'how to make communication more effective.' I go back to the example of improper signage. If a tourist office can't put information on the outside of its wall, how does it expect travelers to find it?

In the past few years there have been a number of community ecotourism projects here in Mexico that have developed websites. "Internet es la moda" (Internet is fashionable) is the decade-long mantra in Latin America. Having an email address is perceived as "cool" even if one does not consult it or answer incoming messages.

I have participated in several workshops funded by international development assistance agencies and they have ALL failed as they considered the workshop the end project. Without providing incentives for communication, the websites or email addresses end up as roadkill on the information highway. It does not have to be that way.

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Ron Mader

Location: Oaxaca, Mexico

Posted: Fri Nov 11, 2005 7:48 am Post subject: Southern Queensland Wildlife Trail

As a reference for the Developing Infrastructure and Marketing, consult the Southern Queensland Wildlife Trail topic

<http://forum.planeta.com/viewtopic.php?t=409>

A co-operative venture between 20 operators in the region, the Southern Queensland Wildlife Trail showcases wildlife tourism experiences easily reached from major cities in the region. Wildlife Tourism Australia produced a map and website.

REFERENCE

Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Islands

<http://forum.planeta.com/viewforum.php?f=6>

Rod Bilz

Location: North Bay, Ontario, Canada

Posted: Fri Nov 11, 2005 4:01 pm Post subject: Niche Marketing

DON'T TRY AND COMPETE WITH THE BIG GUYS!

Something as simple as developing a good relationship with a travel agent that sells ecotourism products will pay big dividends. Spend some time with them give them lots of information so that it is easy for them to sell for you. If you can identify these micro markets you can usually accomplish low volume-high returns successfully.

If you think your facility will appeal to sea kayakers, then prepare a web page for that niche only and make sure it stays on the top of the popular search engines. The very same facility may also appeal to bird watchers. Again, design a web page specifically for this micro market.

It works. And quietly in the background you develop a significant, high quality and loyal clientele.

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Aivar_Ruukel

Location: Estonia

Posted: Sat Nov 12, 2005 7:39 am Post subject: business alliances

I believe very much in "horizontal" business alliances, creation of joint-products and making joint-marketing efforts.

One critical task seems to be, how to organize reservation procedures?

One of the partners in such alliance should take the role of reservation office... What is your experience?

Another opportunity is to use the existing online- reservation systems, one of them focusing on independent travelers is www.backpackertours.com

I am just starting to use this kind of channels, have uploaded first products few weeks ago, and of course there are not yet real results. Does anyone have longer experience with similar web-sites?

Jeremy Garrett

Location: Vermont, USA

Posted: Sat Nov 12, 2005 11:45 am

The important thing about websites is that you need to appear in the top 20 listings (top 10 ideal) of whatever specific search team you are considering. The quick and dirty way is to buy your way to the top; i.e. pay-per-click, but knowledgeable consumers realize that it's a paid listing and may not give it full credence. The other way is to link with appropriate websites -- for us this means tourism and travel-related sites.

What my associates and I recommend is to develop a great website with great links to appropriate, high-quality sites, ideally with reciprocal arrangements (you promote me; I promote you) as this raises your search ranking significantly. But because this can take a good 6-8 months to get your web ranking up, we will also recommend pay-per-click for key search phrases to immediately get your name in the top. There's a whole science to this, and many other variables, but those are the basics.

George Duffy

Location: Black Diamond, AB

Posted: Sat Nov 12, 2005 1:57 pm Post subject: Market Development

Something I think that could be useful is a B to B site made up of qualified partners who share common market interests.

I have a website domain and just a construction site at the moment called www.tourworld.ca

The concept I have is to create a connection point between the travel trade and inbound tour operators in a host of countries and regions. This could also go to the marketing of tour guides as we have been talking about on the Interpretation forum.

The site would be like a switchboard for travel agents and outbound operators to source local expertise when working on tour quotes and developing programs.

The idea is not to create an exhaustive index, but a limited and select group of professional inbound services that want to target this market. In addition to the website would be all the other tools we have available to reach the target market.

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Ron Mader

Location: Oaxaca, Mexico

Posted: Sun Nov 13, 2005 5:55 am Post subject: Trade Shows?

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A few weeks ago Seattle hosted the Adventure Travel Summit

<http://www.adventuretravelworldsummit.com>

It received high praise from several operators, including Costa Rica Expeditions' Michael Kaye who said that it exceeded expectations. It had good entertainment, good networking opportunities and it was bold enough to welcome dissent. (Michael spoke on a panel in which he dismissed attempts to define the market or market size. 'It's as big as you need it to be.' to the dismay of consultants and academics who had prepared a report on the 'adventure travel market'.)

My question is figuring out which trade events are most useful to which operators. I'm asked this all the time by operators with established businesses and from community operators. Show organizers will always claim success. Could we brainstorm about creating a system in which we evaluate how "green," how "people friendly" and how financially effective (ka-ching!) trade shows actually are?

Also, I'd like to propose a grassroots suggestion. In terms of community-building and creating low-cost events, how about working in sitio to promote local eco travel?

In Mexico, I have collaborated with local businesses, government and ngos in developing small, one-day fairs in Oaxaca. We have a budget of about \$200 (US dollars) used to purchase food and print flyers. It's nothing fancy, but the evaluations are always positive. It's an idea I would love to share with other communities.

<http://www.planeta.com/ecotravel/mexico/oaxaca/options.html>

<http://www.planeta.com/ecotravel/mexico/oaxaca/feriarural2005.html>

George Duffy

Location: Black Diamond, AB

Posted: Sun Nov 13, 2005 10:45 am Post subject: Marketing

Ron's notion of trading info on trade shows, there are people out there - primarily DMOs and the like - who do attend a lot of shows. I worked three years coordinating a co-operative marketing program called Partners in Promotion with Travel Alberta in which we spent the better part of 4 months a year on the road at shows every weekend.

It is very hard to evaluate shows in advance. We were restricted by having to comply with the strategic marketing plan in terms of geographical markets. (I could not go to New York because at the time it was only considered an emerging market for us, for example.) That narrowed the field, but our approach was to look at the show statistics, compare it to market data we had, talk to industry partners, and then go out and try to find interest in private sector to partner up on

attending shows. It was still hit or miss although some markets for us proved to be quite outstanding and others real duds.

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The LA Times Travel show was hands down the best show in terms of organization, quality of customer, volume of traffic, freedom from union bullying, intelligent show hours and a beautiful venue right on the waterfront at Long Beach.

The worst one consistently was Chicago. This was a real conundrum for us because visitor stats showed Chicago to be a good primary market for Alberta, but after 5 years in different venues and different promoters, I have still not heard any great things from there. Alberta pulled out.

The Toronto Adventure Travel show and the Toronto Travel and Leisure Shows are both good. The Vancouver Adventure Travel Show is OK with more local products here. But Vancouver is such a wonderful market for outdoor travel I find it amazing that so few international exhibitors come in. The Calgary Adventure show is well run but like Vancouver, because it lacks the profile of larger big city shows it gets passed over by international exhibitors and as a result the exhibitors tend to be more local and the crowds who come tend to reflect that. Never the less, Calgary is a hot outdoor market. Read: lots of money, younger active population, great motivation.

I could go on but maybe a specific forum on Planeta could be set up to talk trade like this.

Ron Mader

Location: Oaxaca, Mexico

Posted: Sun Nov 13, 2005 11:00 am Post subject: Networking

"I could go on but maybe a specific forum on Planeta could be set up to talk trade like this."

If there's interest, we'll do this.

What we have already online is a topic called 'networking' in which registered members of the forum can post a short announcement about events they are attending with the PROVISIO that afterward, they post a short summary. Rationale -- we see too many announcements without summaries and summaries without announcements! You'll find the networking topic online the suggestion box

<http://forum.planeta.com/viewforum.php?f=8>

Jeremy Garrett

Location: Vermont, USA

Posted: Tue Nov 15, 2005 7:07 pm

A word on which conferences/travel shows to attend.... I have served as the Conference Manager for the following events:

- New York Times Travel Show (www.nytimes.com/travelshow) – 2006, 2005 and 2004

- Boston Globe Travel Show (www.bostonglobetravelshow.com) – 2006
- Miami Herald Travel Show (www.miamiheraldtravelexperience.com) – 2006
- Venezuelan ExpoEcoturismo in Maracaibo and Puerto Ordaz, Venezuela (www.expoecoturismo.com) – 2005 and 2003
- Outside Travel Show / IATOS in Chicago, USA – 2005, 2004 and 2003 -- DISCONTINUED in 2006
- Expo Aventura y Ecoturismo in Mexico – 2004
- Trinidad Eco/Adventure FAM Trip in Trinidad – 2004

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My personal feeling is that if you were to exhibit at any show in the U.S., it should be the NY Times Travel Show. I've never seen so much "buzz" at any show in the U.S., including a family atmosphere, and sales off the floor. As an example, in 2004, we presented the final iteration of the IATOS in Chicago and the inaugural NY Times show within one week of each other. I'm reminded of walking down the empty aisles in Chicago and chatting with a small Kenya tour operator, who couldn't get ANYONE to stop at their booth; one week later in NY, they had made a half-dozen sales [SALES!! -- as in contracts and credit card receipts!!] by Saturday afternoon.

Is it because NY is a better or bigger market? Certainly NY is the largest market, but Chicago is in the top 5 with millions of consumers. My gut feeling is that events billing themselves as "adventure" or "ecotourism" shows in North America are not as well attended as "general" travel events. What we saw in Chicago is that even as the ecotourism market was supposedly growing, attendance to the show was flat and finally declining. We felt this was because of the type of person who chooses adventure/eco trips; these highly-motivated people are now internet-savvy, they have proven that they are adventurous, and they do their research online, rather than waste a day driving downtown, paying inflated parking and food costs and strutting the floor. They know the types of guides that they want, where they want to go, and probably the operator they want to use. To counter this trend, the event management company I work with instead decided to develop a "general" show with "adventure/eco" elements, which is what we've done at New York, and now with Boston and Miami.

NEWS FLASH!! And just to corroborate my gut-check, I've just heard from friends attending the Adventures in Travel Expo in San Francisco that the show was dead, and many upset exhibitors.

Well, regardless of the show you attend or exhibit at, I tell friends, clients, acquaintances etc. to choose the event that best matches your product, your target market and your immediate flight connections. For example, I wouldn't market Venezuela to Oman -- doesn't make sense because you can't get there easily. But I will market Venezuela to the New York and Miami shows because there are direct flights.

George's example of visitors from the SE U.S. coming up to Alberta is actually outside the norm because normally we see traffic patterns in a north-to-south or east-to-west basis. Which is probably why his DMO didn't want to support such promotional efforts.

My personal feeling is that tourism businesses themselves will have to do their best promotion -- the national tourism agencies are too beholden to all parties and unable to promote niche travel over mass-travel. They have to go with the numbers, and if we keep saying that eco/adventure/outdoor tourism is only 10 percent of the market, then they're going to spend the funds on the other 90 percent, because that's who's driving the traffic and tax revenue base. I think state/regional tourism agencies can do a better job at supporting niche markets, but it depends on whether the destination has a lot of natural attractions.

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George Duffy

Location: Black Diamond, AB

Posted: Sun Nov 13, 2005 11:23 am Post subject: Marketing

Prior to the Alberta work I did, I had a small online inbound travel company called Absolutely Canada. My main markets were the southeast U.S. (Alabama, Georgia) and the North Atlantic US (Connecticut, New York, Boston). I was selling mostly outdoor adventure and winter product.

These geographic markets were not considered to be primary or in the case of the southeast, even secondary markets for Alberta because they relied on gross visitor arrival stats. They also contradicted marketing intelligence which said Americans choose travel destinations that they can get to with least airport hub stops. Try getting to Alberta without going through one!

I argued back and forth with the brains of the DMO that we should be promoting these areas based on what I and others (other SMEs) were finding in terms of what was really selling, not what was showing up in their arrival stats. The response was that its OK for industry to go to these markets, but the DMO had to follow the plan.

I always find this disconnect between those of us on the front lines and those in the theoretical world frustrating. The upshot is not just that I am annoyed, but that when it comes time to try and participate in some shared funding program, the granting bodies rely on studies which report mass market trends. This effectively cuts off funds to anyone not fitting the big criteria like this, even if they have found a niche worth exploiting that contradicts the data.

Verena Gerber

Location: Celestun

Posted: Sun Nov 13, 2005 12:07 pm

Hello, I am Verena Gerber, owner of Hotel Eco Paraiso in Celestun, Yucatan, Mexico. I have read with interest all the postings of this forum. My thoughts and comments are:

1) I fully agree that we should adhere to the name of ecotourism in spite of the fact that, as Ron states, the definition of this term is very ambiguous and vague and in spite of the green-washing. There has been a lot of effort out there to coin and promote this term. I would also hate

to see this effort lost and blurred with other labels such as sustainable tourism, rural tourism, community tourism, etc.

- 2) I also fully agree with Megan that alliances are imperative to market and promote ecotourism. The question is how? For the last 10 years we have tried to do this with the local community, the local NGO, Merida's travel agencies, international travel agencies and finally international tour operators.
- 3) Only recently, lets say for the last two years we have had some success: The local community has stopped to see us as the 'rich foreigners'; the local NGO work with us in the turtle conservation program; the local authority asks for our opinion, etc. But still we struggle with travel agencies and tour operators. Celestun is sold in Merida as a day tour and international tour operators are not willing to adventure in ecotourism. What is sold out there is Cancun = mass tourism.
- 4) As to tour operators, they want to be sure that they offer quality products. We have contacted them, they have visited our resort, we work with the receptive travel agencies such as Mexatlantica and still, they do not sell nor promote ecotourism. They sell what is fashionable = Cancun. Are we too early in the market?
- 5) I fully agree that the role of the government is to promote a region, with all that is offered, including ecotourism. Sometimes they fail in the latter, but here in Mexico, slowly but surely they are 'discovering' the benefit of it. I strongly believe, as stated in the forum, that our clients do not seek ecotourism per se, they go visit a destination and if they find something interesting enough, including an ecotourism product, they will book it. In my experience it is not the other way around.
- 6) Finally, my experience in marketing Hotel Eco Paraiso:
The most successful and less expensive marketing tool has been the web. Right now, 30% of our bookings come through the web.

Small focused travel agencies. We work with 5 international ones, that sell Mexico AND ecotourism. As stated in the forum, look for your niche market; don't pretend to compete with the big guys.

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Instead of trying to work with big tour operators, work with local receptive travel agencies, which give them the confidence of offering quality products.

As to trade shows, again, stay focused. Ecotourism is misplaced in the big international trade shows such as ITB or FITUR. Ron's question about "figuring out which trade events are most useful to which operators. I'm asked this all the time by operators with established businesses and from community operators. Show organizers will always claim success. Could we brainstorm about creating a system in which we evaluate how "green," how "people friendly"

and how financially effective (ka-ching!) trade shows actually are?" is excellent! I second the motion.

Awards are better than certifications.

We have not been very successful in other marketing tools such as ads in newspapers, T.V., radio, etc. They are expensive and bring not much business.

Offer as many FAM trips as you can.

Last but not least, a suggestion: there are a lot of short terms used in the forum like SME, BOT, DMO, B to B, SEO, SEM, MET, CBT, CBE, which some of us, like me, are not familiar with. I had a hard time trying to understand what they meant. Is there a possibility to make a glossary of those terms? Thank you.

Paul Radchenko

Location: Medicine Hat, Alberta

Posted: Sun Nov 13, 2005 4:09 pm

As an academic, one of my main goals it to alleviate the disconnect between those of you on the front lines and those of us who provide much of the theoretical information.

Ecotourism truly is an applied science and we have to spend more time (and money) understanding its application amongst all of its broad areas, including marketing, which I believe this forum is attempting to achieve!

With respect to the issue of marketing, our 2nd year students are introduced to Wearing and Neil's chapter "Meeting and Shaping Expectations" followed by Pam Wight's article "Not a Homogeneous Market Segment" in Weaver's Encyclopedia of Ecotourism.

A lot of theory and unanswered questions here but we try and tackle two main questions - What is the ecotourism market and how do you best market ecotourism?

We follow this up with as many case studies (best practices) as possible so that we can get a sense as to what has worked and what hasn't - any recent ones out there you wish to share?

With respect to "marketing ecotourism", I agree with Ron's grassroots suggestion to promote community-building and creating low-cost events as well as working in to promote local eco travel? This becomes a matter of taking an inventory of your resources and taking them and your product idea to the next level with the support of local stakeholders.

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Many of you out there have done this I know! Who were your stakeholders? What were some of your challenges? What was the cost involved?

These examples need to be told and heard.

We are working with the local government level here to promote our region - naturally of course - but are very upfront and collaborative with all stakeholders involved.

Has anyone read the 7 WTO market intelligence studies to come out of Year 2000? Are they/have they been relevant (practical) for you? Are they too theoretical and perhaps out of date?

With respect to the "ecotourism market", I would agree with Verna in that most clients do not seek ecotourism - as travel is still very much destination based - which makes the operators task that much more challenging.

After my short time at Hotel Eco Paraiso last Feb and my discussion with Ernesto, I came away with a sense that, with respect to marketing, less may be more!

Richard Edwards

Location: Seattle, Washington, USA

Posted: Sun Nov 13, 2005 11:11 pm

Paul, Thank you for representing the academic sector. I very much believe that university programs in ecotourism would benefit greatly from more "real time" exposure, and encourage anyone out there with recently completed documentation of a project that could be used as a case study to share the link here.

My thought is that for the reciprocal relationship between ecotourism and academics to be mutually beneficial, information is going to need to move back and forth more quickly. Due to that time lapse, what we've seen from most studies we've mentioned here is a validation of ideas we were already keying on as private businesses.

The term Ecotourism is beginning to have some real value in the market, and TIES' name has a lot of equity as well. I would like to see TIES concentrate much more on marketing above other activities.

Cooperative marketing and alliances are the way to go to leverage your business and have more market reach. It takes a tremendous amount of work to be heard in this era of communication overload, and a cooperative effort increases your chances greatly.

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There is no faster way to have private sector people with their eyes glazed over is to speak in acronyms. To that end-

SME- Small and Medium Enterprises

BOT- Build, Operate and Transfer

DMO- Destination Marketing Organization

B to B- Business to Business (as used in both sales and marketing, and as opposed to Business to Consumer)

SEO- Search Engine Optimization (trying to show up on the non-paid listings in Google, Yahoo, etc.)

SEM- Search Engine Marketing (all the efforts to have paid and unpaid listings in search engine work to build your business)

MET- This was from Ron's Media, Environment and Tourism Conference

CBT- Community-Based Tourism

CBE- Community Based Ecotourism

Consistency- The one core concept that just leaps out at me in moments of lucidity within my daily, weekly, and yearly labor in marketing of sales of ecotourism is that if you are Consistent with basically any reasonably well-thought out marketing effort, it will be successful. This applies to everything from continuing consistent meetings among the members of a marketing cooperative/alliance, to getting out that newsletter the first of every month, to constantly updating your online content. Paul said that maybe less is more, and I think that's true if you need to limit your activities so that you can be consistent with the ones you have decided will be most effective.

I completely disagree that a small business shouldn't compete with the "big boys". A SME just needs to pick the areas where it can compete with the big boys, and do it better. Creating niches may be more fun and interesting, and our industry has many success stories with that, but along with that kind of entrepreneurship it's necessary (with a higher probability of a good return) to work on your strengths to compete within known segments as well.

Ron Mader

Location: Oaxaca, Mexico

Posted: Tue Nov 15, 2005 4:38 am Post subject: Online advertising

Here's an interesting Google ad a colleague referred me today. Solutions for Travel: Where to go, Who to Fly, Where to Stay?

"Today's travel consumers are growing more savvy and sophisticated. Throughout the travel research and buying process they turn to the Web and search engines like Google to help inform their decisions – decisions on vacation destinations, flights, hotel rooms, car rentals, cruises and more. The Google AdWords™ program helps travel marketers reach these consumers at all stages of the buying cycle – while they're doing initial research, comparing specific options or getting ready to purchase."

http://www.google.com/ads/metrics_trav.html

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REFERENCE

Google Guide

<http://www.planeta.com/web/onlinegoogle.html>

Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Tue Nov 15, 2005 5:56 am

Please allow me to post a note from a non-registered private sector player who honored me by sending it directly.

"Maquipucuna is a private cloudforest reserve (6,000 ha) and ecolodge located in northwest Ecuador, own and run by a non-profit organization Fundacion Maquipucuna. Fundacion Maquipucuna also initially supported the creation of two locally community owned ecotourism operations, and years of training for local administrators, guides, cooks and chefs. Bird lists as well as plant inventories, and monitoring protocols, the knowledge base for all three operations have also being produced directly by Fundacion Maquipucuna's contribution.

I been able to follow some of the ongoing forum Ecotourism Emerging Industry Forum, but I'm unable to join the forum fully, so if you don't mind, and since you seem to be one of the most hands on practical ecotourism person in the forum, I'd like to ask you a question for the forum. What percentage of occupation (vs bookings) can one expect from a good website. EcoParaiso in Merida says they get 30% of their bookings. We are in the process of negotiating with a tour operator to market Maquipucuna. It would be illogical to give them 25% of the gross income if perhaps the FIT's are coming thanks to our existing reputation and the new website we are working on.

Thank you for your insightful contributions to the Forum - we are in a crucial moment working extensively to increase occupancy, so what we are learning is very timely. Also thanks in advance if you can add the information indicated above."

Mary Finn

Location: US & Ecuador

Posted: Tue Nov 15, 2005 10:35 am Post subject: On guerrilla marketing, backpackers and volunteers for CBEs

I just wanted to share some experiences and thoughts on possible 'guerrilla marketing' tactics for small ecotourism orgs. This is based on a few years living and working with a small community in Ecuador, who had gotten a head start on some infrastructure and training via a small project with a local NGO. At project's end, there was no marketing system in place and the community wanted to work towards being able to manage their own operation independently. But of course they had no capital to invest, nor experience in tourism or any kind of marketing

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In this situation, internet marketing worked well – and in fact, I can't imagine any other way they could have gotten started, since (as many others have stated), most tourism operators do NOT

want to work with unproven organizations. So how to begin to get the word out internationally, and start getting visitors and income, while simultaneously empowering the community and giving them a chance to 'learn as they went'?

What we did was to begin a program of paying volunteers, and yes, backpackers, since these groups were much more inclined to be 'forgiving' in terms of things like relative inaccessibility, and of the service being a bit 'rough around the edges.' Many were drawn specifically by the chance to participate in some useful activities (planting trees, teaching English, even some building and other things.) The internet marketing we also learned as we went along – thanks, I must add, largely to Ron at Planeta.com

The first, admittedly 'rustic' website got on line in 2001, when I think it may have also been easier to get some attention online as traffic was less 'way back then' and other websites didn't have as much 'flash' and animation - <http://www.santa-lucia.org>

We also tried to follow some of the other things people have mentioned – like getting links on other, high traffic websites, and also , as Ron has stated, did as much networking as we could in the 'real world' simultaneously. But there again, my involvement in Ron's forums (sorry if this sounds like a plug for Planeta!) helped to get in contact with others working in ecotourism in Ecuador, like Andres and Michelle of Black Sheep Inn, Betty and Diego at Casa Mojanda, and Marcello of Alandaluz. In great part thru these contacts, the community became better known, and was invited to join the local ecotourism association as well as the EcuadorVerde network. The community is now is pretty much up and running as an independent operation, and has even gotten some international recognition, as you can see on their new website - <http://www.santaluciaecuador.com>

I should add that I don't necessarily recommend this 'bootstrap' model using volunteers & backpackers, at least, not without several caveats. One is, as others I believe have pointed out, the type of visitor you first bring in can set the tone for the future of the operation. And unfortunately, not all visitors are as conscientious about (or even cognizant of) the importance of community traditions and social issues. (In some extreme cases young volunteers seemed to have thought they were trying out for a part on 'college kids gone wild') It's very important therefore that there be open, community-wide discussions about setting and enforcing social norms and behavioral codes for visitors.

There are other downsides with volunteers (but this is for a different forum!), but the concept I think could work, with the appropriate controls, for other community and small enterprises. There is a market niche for 'volunTouring' (or `service tourism') as well, that I understand is intermediate between a 'full time volunteer' who works 4- 8 hour days, and a tourist who does no work (I think it involve a somewhat extended stay, with perhaps a half day to day of planting trees or other 'attractive' and easy volunteer work.) Again, though the margins are lower on these types of visitors, on the other hand, they tend to stay longer (sometimes weeks or months), with an added benefit for a remote community that often these are less exacting as far as arrival logistics because of the longer stay.

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I am wondering what others experience may be in this type of niche. Also, it occurs to me that this is where ecotourism students, like Paul Radchenko's, might be able to help out with small emerging enterprises, while at the same time gaining some useful, real world experience for themselves.

My last comment has to do with the notion that backpackers are not an appropriate market segment for CBT. Having said that some backpackers and volunteers we found to be disrespectful of community norms, I don't think that's necessarily the case for all. In fact, I understand that there are different segments within the 'backpacker' label, and that 'upscale backpackers' (or what ever the appropriate term should be), can be a very lucrative market niche, and one relatively easily reached via internet marketing. In a recent visit to Black Sheep Inn, they seem to be very successful with what seems to me to be precisely this type of visitor – independent, somewhat economy minded, and therefore perhaps a bit less 'fussy' in terms of luxuries, but respectful of both the environment and local culture. If this is so, wouldn't this be one of the most ideal segments for CBTs/CBEs? I would certainly think Black Sheep Inns' success suggests that this would be so. Any thoughts on this?

Richard Edwards

Location: Seattle, Washington, USA

Posted: Tue Nov 15, 2005 7:11 pm

We began our week with Peter straightening those of us out who think that certification is not an attractive value proposition for clients/travelers. He has had a good experience with the Swedish government and non-profit sectors assisting in making the Nature's Best label a valuable marketing tool.

Among those who question the value of certification, there seems to be agreement on the point that if a certification program is industry driven, as opposed to run by an NGO, then it has a better possibility for success. Nonetheless, government needs to play a role in ecotourism industry development, because the long start-up times can be debilitating for small businesses.

An over-arching theme has been the need for an “alliance” of businesses that provide for the motor for increasing market reach for the ecotourism industry. This alliance might also work in the areas of product development and support for start-ups.

Several were in favor of using the equity the term ecotourism has built, continuing to define it in our own minds and the minds of consumers, and not dilute the term or abandon it in favor of some other term. Others aren't so sure that ecotourism is even a market.

There were several posts from a variety of countries questioning the viability and actual effectiveness of Internet marketing. There are those who believe that Internet marketing is more of a challenge than necessary for smaller businesses and it would be more effective to distribute their time among other channels, with the web being only one. We've also seen quite a bit of evidence from other contributors that it's not out of reach for SMEs to successfully focus their marketing endeavors on the Internet. My experience over the last 5 years with businesses of

smaller and medium size is that we can compete with anybody, small or large, with considerable but feasible effort. That said, so far we are all in agreement that an approach that is at least somewhat multi-pronged is only rational.

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Richard Edwards

Location: Seattle, Washington, USA

Posted: Tue Nov 15, 2005 7:42 pm

I'd like to say that in my experience 30% of reservations coming from a website is a pretty good number to use as your goal. A lodge with a strong marketing program may even have a higher %, though referral business is the best so you want that at 30% or more, too.

What I've found is that the best activities you can do so that your site does well in the search engines (i.e. getting links on other sites; adding content to your own site with lots of keywords that people would use who might want to stay with you; maintaining a blog that frequently talks about you, your site, and your products) are the same kinds of activities that build awareness in general. Lots of people will pick up on your site if you have good, new content.

Giving 25% of your gross to single company is really high, especially if you are planning on having 1 to 1.5 people working on your marketing as well.

Neither working as an operator or at the lodge level have I had any luck with sites like backpacker.com, nor any of those portals that you would expect to drive business to you. They may help you a bit with traffic, but not with actual reservations, probably because the leads aren't usually very well qualified. Each one of those sites has a couple of quotes from recognizable satisfied customers, but I have yet to see any significant traffic, much less bookings, from those kinds of placements.

What is helpful is to have links on sites that have to do with travel and not have those links dynamically generated. In other words, the links need to be in the same place all of the time on the site. If the only way to get your links is to show up on a particular site is to run any kind of a search, or choose a destination and activity and have the results match that choice, the link is not worth your time.

George Duffy

Location: Black Diamond, AB

Posted: Wed Nov 16, 2005 11:04 am Post subject: Marketing

Personally, I found the internet much more useful 10 years ago when it was a lot less crowded and am now in the process of switching my focus on making my site useful to the travel trade where I am developing the majority of my business from. But each business adjusts their tactics as the battle continues.

This brings up the subject of yield versus volume. As I have been progressing with the development of my own small business I am finding that there is a better market closer to the top end than at the bottom end of the price/value strata. Not only in fact do I find higher sales as a result of more expensive programs, but greater profit.

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This leads me to a couple of points: first, when an ecotourism project is in the planning stage, try planning for high quality and value. And, in that process, plan for pricing to allow a certain percentage of sales to be derived direct; some from inbound operators; from international tour operators and from retail agents. Scale discounts and commissions accordingly. I disagree with Richard that 25% is too high to be devoting to an operator as they need this to pass on a level of commission to others in the marketing channel. BUT, don't have that as your only source. You can't rely on one distribution channel. In the end you get a blend of markets which should be more resilient to the wild ups and downs of this crazy business.

In western Canada we have some very well known hotels that have become tourism icons in their own right. I refer to the Banff Springs Hotel and the Chateau Lake Louise. Another icon is the Rocky Mountaineer Railway. These businesses never lack for visitors and they sell at the top end of the price spectrum here. They are even full when others are lagging. The desire for luxury straddles all demographics. It is a lot easier to start with a more expensive rate and then offer discounts when you need to attract more business than it is to try and increase your rates when your margins start to erode. I would say that. Mexico is still saddled with a low cost, high volume reputation and it is hard to shake that perception.

That I guess brings up the issue of authenticity. Can you supply luxury and still be authentic? I think so, if you stretch the word luxury to include the concept of limited access.

Moderator

Richard Edwards

Location: Seattle, Washington, USA

Posted: Wed Nov 16, 2005 12:21 pm

Just to clarify on the 25%. That is a very fair commission rate for wholesalers on individual reservations as they come in. What I was understanding from Verena is that there was a possible deal in the works to be handing over 25% of gross income overall to have a company be in charge of your marketing. That would be too much.

George Duffy

Location: Black Diamond, AB

Posted: Wed Nov 16, 2005 3:05 pm

Yes I would agree 25% of the total gross income would be high.

Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Thu Nov 17, 2005 2:20 am

I'd say that the commission percentage is related to price, sales volume and risk. While amounts are more regular in the mass tourism industry, in ecotourism the price composition is still so variable that unless you're talking similar products, same destination and same channels, variance might be too broad to report. The actual amount depends on the cost structure of every particular operation, and on the fixed/variable cost distribution. One thing is for sure: there's quite a lot of value in bringing customers in and selling products out there!! As a product operator, if a GSA, e-marketplace or retailer pitches my message in a way I'm comfortable with, brings me regularly satisfying volumes of business, low no-shows, responds to queries almost immediately and actually listens to me often, hey, let's talk about raising that percentage! In fact, why not become partners???

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Jamie Sweeting

Location: Washington D.C.

Posted: Thu Nov 17, 2005 1:49 pm Post subject: Various things

My 2 cents worth is not to overlook tapping into parts of the mainstream business to business supply chain linkages...what on Earth am I talking about?

I feel there are too many people who claim to work in "ecotourism" that are horrified by the thought that someone on a mass tourism trip (think cruise ship or large outbound tour company - say, TUI or First Choice) might want to experience an authentic, culturally rich trip that benefits local people and the environment (and isn't that ecotourism?)

From the perspective of a small business or community you really shouldn't care where your tourists are coming from as long as they pay a reasonable price (and yes in this side of the business it is tough so it becomes volume vs. price) and act reasonably (culturally appropriate etc.). If you control the product offering, are able to provide a trustworthy service whereby your market partner, who is sub-contracting you, can be assured of product quality, safety, service and reliability then you can potentially tap into a reliable source of business.

I have been recently researching market connectivity between SMEs and the cruise sector. There are some good examples, and could and should be many more. One example we came across was an ecolodge owner who developed a day tour to visit his lodge and the local community (where they sold handicrafts etc.) - while the \$ spend in the village was not as much per person as overnight visitors, it was still significant. Obviously steps needed to be taken to limit numbers, flows etc. Though to my knowledge, although demand has been growing it is not nearly 'mass' quantities yet. This additional income has eased the burden of the highs and lows of overnight demand through the seasons. What I haven't found out is if any of the cruise passengers (or their friends) have ever come back as overnight guests!

Certainly market penetration into these supply chains is far from easy (most cruise lines sub-contract through one or two national agencies -- primarily due to price/volume and

liability/quality assurance concerns) but they are looking to diversify their product offerings (and a high end day ecotour may generate more revenue for them than a typical booze and beach day package!)

I am most interested to hear if anyone who considers themselves an "ecotourism" business is, or knows of anyone else who is, penetrating the "mass" market in this manner?

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Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Fri Nov 18, 2005 7:42 am

Please allow me to post a note from a non-participant who asked me to air his views, which I thought well taken - I've seen the things he talks about happen. This also links well with Jamie's point about working up and down the chain, and with learning to work with the "traditional" tourism industry and its expertise.

"My name is Michael Fox, and I've been consulting on Ecotourism since 1991, when USAID came to me and asked if Ecotourism could help sustain the environment in Africa. What I found at the time was that virtually everyone who had something to do with Ecotourism was an environmentalist, conservationist, or some other kind of development expert. Virtually no one who had a great deal to do with Ecotourism actually had a tourism industry background. And those that did have a tourism industry background were conservation-oriented individuals, with small companies and reasonable success, but not usually great success. The situation hasn't changed a whole lot since then!

I'm currently in Vietnam where I've just finished working on marketing Ecotourism on Phu Quoc Island, after some workshops on marketing for the Nepal Tourism Board (for SNV) and a lecture in Bengal, India, on Ecotourism and Biodiversity Conservation (for the Fulbright people). So I've been working on Ecotourism marketing over the past six weeks, and that's what prompts me to write in and express my views. I have just a few points to make:

1. Ecotourism is a business, and as such, needs to be distinguished from fields such as "rural poverty alleviation", "rural development", "environmental conservation", and so on. While Ecotourism can impact those areas and lead to sustainable development in many areas, it is still primarily a business venture. Therefore, NGOs, Conservation Organizations, Donor Agencies and the like are some of the worst possible "experts" relative to the sustainability of the Ecotourism ventures they promote. The problem is that while intending good outcomes for the environment, local communities, and regions, they frequently have given false hope to individuals and communities relative to what tourism can do for them. The first key question needs to be "is there a sustainable tourism business here?" I'm afraid this question is typically not asked, and if it is, it is not answered by someone with expertise in the tourism industry. Thus many projects are developed or built, with little thought as to marketing. And when thought is brought to bear, marketing advice is usually given by a student, intern, or someone who may have a passing knowledge of marketing. Tourism industry marketing requires great expertise,

and very specific expertise. I almost never find that the type of expertise needed is being brought to bear on most ecotourism initiatives.

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2. When I sold my tourism operation, I felt the most important thing I could do would be to “make a difference” in the world, and the area where I could contribute the most was Ecotourism. But in my experience, strangely enough, it has often been quite difficult to find ecotourism assignments, as recruiters often do not appreciate industry expertise in itself - they see it as "too commercial". In fact, they often look for the off-industry expertise (in conservation, interpretation, development assistance, etc) even if the TORs specifically indicate marketing and business development! I make this point only because I think conservation NGOs, donor agencies and development agencies should take a hard look at who and what they need to be focused on these kinds of projects and initiatives. Conservation, rural development, rural poverty alleviation, and many important development issues can be impacted if the business of ecotourism fails, and if that's how one counts, then perhaps that's an explanation for the current outcome. Ecotourism indicators can be benchmarked in many ways, but if sustainability of the Ecotourism venture itself is being measured, it is actually about numbers of tourists, numbers of arrivals, and profit margins.

3. Briefly, marketing has to do with understanding what your product is, what your message is, and learning how to express that message dynamically in the marketplace. You need to have a vision, you need to understand channels of distribution, who your best partners are, how decision-makers make decisions, and how to get your product in the right people's hands. It's not enough to have writers write about your product, you need the right writers with the right message. It's not enough to work trade shows (even if you just focus on the “best” shows”), you need to know how to work those shows. And believe me, it's not sitting behind a booth that gets the job done!

4. If you are evaluating your own efforts at marketing, the first step I always take is to ask what kind of a budget there is for marketing. I strongly recommend that 30% of any budget go towards marketing. If 30% isn't being spent from inception of a given project, that's sufficient reason to think you won't succeed! Further, it often will take 24 months or longer to make a tourism product or destination succeed. You need to have a proper roadmap to understand the cycles of tourism, and enough capital to withstand the journey. It could be you're doing everything right, but expecting unrealistic results 16 months into a project. Again, understanding the tourism industry and the critical variables that come to bear on your particular product or destination is key. With the right evaluation going into to development of a project, and technical assistance all along the way (even if it's just to transfer capacity), you can succeed. But this is more a function of the travel and tourism industry than the distinction “Ecotourism”.

5. Relative to the term “Ecotourism”, I have a mixed feeling. The term “Ecotourism” has done a great job cleansing the word ”tourism” such that development agencies and donor agencies will spend money on it. So relative to sourcing funding, it makes sense to continue using the term. But relative to selling tourism products, the word should be retired rapidly. For one thing, the term is often exploited, and the conversation about certification should be enough to convince

anyone that the word means too many different things for many different people. But more important, no one buys an "Ecotour" per se. People buy bird safaris, wildlife safaris, natural history tours, hiking tours, rafting tours, etc. The destination is the first priority, as someone else commented. But virtually no one I know would buy an "Ecotour". We all like what that image connotes but that image is not a driving force in tourist decision-making. So don't use it to describe your product, describe your product for the activity it is, or the destination you are selling, or something else. We don't need one more distinction for tourism products. Call the product what it is, and "Ecotour" is almost always a secondary descriptor.

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I'm only sorry I haven't been able to log in and be a part of the dialogue, as I was in remote parts of Nepal and India without a lot of Internet access. But I'd be pleased to continue the dialogue with anyone who would like to pursue this further. I can be reached at mrmwfox@cs.com, and I'll be back in Chicago in the next couple of weeks. Thank you!"

George Duffy

Location: Black Diamond, AB

Posted: Fri Nov 18, 2005 11:40 am Post subject: Marketing Recommendations

I would reiterate that people overseeing ecotourism projects or those looking at funding them look for ways to incorporate advisors from private sector in tourism from the initial stages. Anyone who is in this business will tell you it is not as simple as it looks and it takes a lot longer than many might plan for to get a product accepted in the marketplace. It would be very wise to have a good marketing strategy in place early on and to start building relationships even before a project might be ready to go to market just because it does take time to build.

I would love to see some donor money slated to partnered marketing. My very first post outlined a very transparent and fair way that I have seen work to leverage private and public dollars ([three main guidelines for funding assistance](#)). It turns one dollar into two (or more), shares risk and reward. It is a bottom up approach that has no lower limit so micro sized programs and much larger ones can all participate. This could perhaps be administered by an "ecotourism marketing alliance officer" or something like that in each region or country. I know how we do it here but each region will be different.

Last, despite everything, I do think a label of authenticity will someday, (maybe sooner than we think) have value. Totally anecdotal, but many people I meet and many travel agents I present my product to will "vote with their dollars" if we have high value products that are competitive with similar quality the marketplace. But the job of creating that label should probably begin today. I think the timing is right. I see corporate giants like Starbucks and Home Depot wading in to this and they are helping to make people think about origins and process. And who can forget Genuine Columbian Coffee? It is a point of differentiation that we can use to create a more premium priced product that can elevate us above the cost comparisons people use for commodities - like mass market travel. Nature's Best - says it all.

Interpretive Program Development

MODERATOR: Jeremy Garrett

TOPIC:

1. Guide training programs
2. Management of visitors in sensitive ecosystems
3. Development of programs in cooperation with local communities
4. Discussion of sensitive cross cultural interactions

Jeremy Garrett

Location: Vermont, USA

Posted: Tue Nov 01, 2005 9:09 am

Welcome to the forums. I'm excited to learn what you find effective in developing interpretive programming, especially relating to community interactions. In many instances, interpretation is the only means to make a connection between the visitor and the resource, so it is vital to be done correctly in a fun atmosphere.

For background, I'm the principal of NaTour Communications (www.NaTour.us), a consulting firm specializing in the development, marketing and promotion of sustainable tourism products and destinations. Prior to starting NaTour, I worked for The International Ecotourism Society, and before that with a state wildlife agency in the U.S., which is where I gained my first-hand knowledge of guide training and interpretation.

With our agency, we developed guide training programs for two specific wildlife areas -- one a bat cave housing one million Mexican free-tailed bats, and the other a wetland area with boardwalk. Both required separate training programs due to the differences in habitat and wildlife species, and we worked with volunteers (mostly from the local communities). We would hold an annual pre-"season" training, and then periodic trainings throughout the year on various subjects (interpreting the flora and fauna, giving better presentations, etc.), and then an annual "wrap-up" training and party to recognize the volunteers for their efforts.

Rod Bilz

Location: North Bay, Ontario, Canada

Posted: Tue Nov 01, 2005 9:59 am Post subject: Using Geocaching as a Network for Interpretive Programming

We are currently developing a sustainable tourism infrastructure which we hope will be implemented in the Iwokrama Rain Forest in Guyana.

The concept is to use the popular activity of geocaching to guide users to points of interest throughout the one million acre reserve. The theme is the 12 Giants of the El Dorado. This area houses 12 species that are the largest of their kind either in the world or on the continent (eg. Harpy Eagle). The intent is to set up a network of guided high quality geocaches in areas where there is a good likelihood of seeing these species. The geocache locations enable us to direct tourism where we want it to go and with a guide accompanying the tourist.

The local Amerindian community is heavily involved and has several trained guides. Sightings of these rare species through the geocache network will be accurately and diligently recorded to provide scientific data for trend-through-time analysis. The final product will produce a themed draw to Guyana, involvement and benefits for the local community, provide valuable scientific data and will combine new technology (GPS) with sustainable tourism.

The hook here is similar to bird watchers that have their life lists of bird observations. We hope that visitors will return to check off each of the 12 Giants of El Dorado. I'd love to hear any comments or ideas related to this concept.

Jeremy Garrett

Location: Vermont, USA

Posted: Mon Nov 07, 2005 7:13 am

I'd like to reiterate the importance of interpretation to the ecotourism industry. There are few destinations in the world that offer anything unique or individual. Just how many howler monkeys do you need to see in a lifetime? How many beaches? How many rainforest trails?

However, a good interpreter will weave the story of the place into the overall message of the necessity for conservation and support of the local communities. Training is necessary so that your guides and interpretation are accurate, interesting and above all, fun -- no one takes a vacation so that they have to take a college course in biology.

The geocaching activity posted above is an innovative and modern take on today's guiding/interpretation. It might be a little intimidating to people who aren't familiar with GPS, but I think if it were explained as a "treasure hunt" using today's modern technology, it might come across as an easier "sell" to potential participants. But what a great idea to utilize local communities and unique places, providing a "checklist" of sorts for the non-birdwatchers.

George Duffy

Location: Black Diamond, AB

Posted: Mon Nov 07, 2005 10:42 am

I heard about geo-cacheing a year or two ago and it fascinated me because it seemed to be of those sleeper trends. I think it holds a lot potential as an interpretive tool as well as a destination magnet. There are a lot of people doing it and there are a lot of hikers out there who already have a GPS unit for aiding in orientation, at least here in western Canada.

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For the other question of human interpretive guides, I think it will be universally agreed that a good guide is one of the most crowd pleasing features of any travel experience. Some guides do develop followings and they actually become the product.

The sad fact seems to be that guides are generally poorly paid and underappreciated at least until after the fact. People love the guide and maybe they give great tips, but would they pay more in advance for a good guide? My initial response is no, but maybe that's just because we have never really promoted guides like we have other professional servers like say restaurant chefs. Maybe we need to start nature guide critics like restaurant critics or movie critics.

Sometimes the more you charge, the more you create demand because some people think that if it costs a lot, it must be good.

Ron Mader

Location: Oaxaca, Mexico

Posted: Mon Nov 07, 2005 11:31 am Post subject: Geocaching

Just a few references ... I have not tried geocaching, but it is quite popular

Check out the references online Planeta's geography guide
<http://www.planeta.com/ecotravel/resources/geography.html>

You can also conduct a web search
<http://a9.com/geocaching>

Jeremy Garrett

Location: Vermont, USA

Posted: Thu Nov 10, 2005 7:23 am

What would a guide/interpreter have to do to reach that exalted status where they are a name; i.e. "famous"? And is it realistic to think that consumers will pay more for guiding services, let alone outbound tour operators? I'm thinking here of a local guide, who offers his services to an inbound operator, who then wholesales the product to an outbound operator.

I just can't see that guides will get paid much more than where they're at now. Any time you're at the bottom of the chain, you're going to make much less than at the top. But conceivably, if the guide is successful, they can move from being simply a guide to starting their own tour operation, whereby they can command higher prices. What is everyone's experience in this?

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Also, who offers the best guide training programs? I know RARE used to be heavily involved in this, but think they've pulled back somewhat. Is Rainforest Alliance now filling this role? And if not, who can provide it to developing countries?

Theresa Southam

Location: Nelson, BC CANADA

Posted: Thu Nov 10, 2005 12:56 pm Post subject: Rewards of Interpretation

Hello it's Theresa Southam a naturalist/trainer of 25 years from Canada. In terms of pay I know of guides who are servicing wealthy individuals by building experiences for them, their families, their companies. This type of personalized service is well-paid and engaging since it is different every time. Another type of reward that I am seeing is what Pine and Gilmour in their book *The Experience Economy* call 'transformation'. This is when through interpretation or experience-making we can cause the conditions for people to transform, gain wisdom, become fulfilled. It's this kind of thing that keeps me in the field.

In terms of training from what I can see the North American Association for Environmental Education still has some of the best training. I have been offering courses that lead to a certificate in Enrichment Travel (adding value to your tourism product by incorporating the culture and nature of the region) but the certification is at a regional level from our Selkirk College.

Theresa Southam, www.southamconsulting.com, 250-354-1088

George Duffy

Location: Black Diamond, AB

Posted: Fri Nov 11, 2005 6:04 pm Post subject: Celebrity Guides

Good question

What would a guide/interpreter have to do to reach that exalted status where they are a name; i.e. "famous"? And is it realistic to think that consumers will pay more for guiding services, let alone outbound tour operators?"

We have had guides who were brilliant, who simply demanded and got more money from us. Or, they shop their services around. That's one way.

People have very vivid memories of great guides. I have overheard many a conversation amongst travellers talking about X being an absolutely fantastic guide in Kenya, or wherever. There must be a way to capitalize on that great word of mouth advertising.

I think it is entirely reasonable to expect that people will pay more for great guides. After all, look at all the very expensive tours hosted by some perceived expert. For example, I am working on a tour right now that is going to be led by a local celebrity food critic, who has also gotten into guiding international tours. It is not exactly the same, but it does show that people will pay for this type of added value.

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Can this translate to consumers who direct buy guide services at a destination? That is very hard to see. They are looking more at a commodity at that point, unless for something really specific like birding. How to communicate that at a destination is a bit challenging.

Outbound tour companies paying more? I think it entirely reasonable if an inbound operator positions itself as having best guides, and delivers the goods, that they could command more money from their outbound colleagues who buy their services. The flip side is true as well. If you have a rep for poor guides, you are not going to go too far.

Myself, if I believe that my clients get better service from one guide over another, of course I will pay more. I also advise clients why it costs more and why it's worth more. Generally I am selling privately guided tours anyhow so this is more critical to me.

Verena Gerber

Location: Celestun

Posted: Sun Nov 13, 2005 10:14 am

Hello, I am Verena Gerber, owner of Hotel Eco Paraiso in Celestun, Yucatan, Mexico. Working for us is Alex Dzib a indigenous bilingual naturalist guide with a bachelors degree in ornithology and very knowledgeable not only in ornithology, but in local natural history. He conducts the 12 ecological tours that we offer to explore the unique Special Biosphere Reserve of Celestun. In our experience our guests are not willing to pay more for his expertise. We all know that a good guide makes the difference in any tour, much more so in enhancing the experience and information of an ecological excursion. Does anybody know how to market and portray to the guest a good guide so that they are willing to pay more?

Another matter is the interpretative trails. We at Eco Paraiso have spent a lot of time and money to get the proper information about the vast biodiversity that is present in the reserve. There is a lot of information out there, but mostly very technical, scientific and boring. It has been a big challenge to present our guests information that they care for and have a relation to. Again, in our experience, local knowledge of medicinal uses and anecdotes has been very useful.

Rod Bilz

Location: North Bay, Ontario, Canada

Posted: Sun Nov 13, 2005 2:04 pm Post subject: Variety of Interpretive Programs

Part of any interpretive program is what do the visitors take with them? I think it is very important that they take something with them that is a reminder of the trip and it also markets the experience to others that they share with.

Photos are a good example but that really just scratches the surface. A recent trip that I took to the rain forest got me thinking of the multitude of sounds in the forest and for me some of these sounds are what stand out most for me being from Canada.

I think an exceptionally interesting interpretive program would be to have a trained guide that could record the sounds of your trip with a parabolic microphone. At the end of the trip the sounds you have heard would be recorded on a CD along with a checklist of the sounds contained on the CD. I know I was haunted by the sounds of the Howler monkeys the first time I heard them. Recording the personally experienced sounds of the rain forest and having the opportunity to take them with you would be a unique and interesting option.

Another interesting product to take from your trip is a personalized map. We have done this type of thing domestically. A GPS unit can track a persons adventures including hikes, treks, kayaking or whatever mode of transportation. Points of interest such as wildlife sightings, references for photos taken etc. can also be plotted. At the end of the trip, a high quality GIS map can be made showing all the individual adventures experienced and specific points of interest. If the quality is good enough it can be framed. These are great ways of documenting a trip and are great marketing tools when clients show them to friends and perspective new clients.

Verena Gerber

Location: Celestun

Posted: Sun Nov 13, 2005 5:01 pm Post subject: sounds

We will try to have a parabolic microphone and record "our" sounds. We have a lot of bird songs which are common to ornithologist, but not to the general public - some explanation is needed. Could you please explain to me what GIS map means? Sorry, I am not familiar with this term.

Rod Bilz

Location: North Bay, Ontario, Canada

Posted: Sun Nov 13, 2005 8:21 pm Post subject: GIS Mapping

If you are familiar with a GPS (Global Positioning System) unit then GIS (Geographic Information System) is the other half of the puzzle. The GPS collects the location and spatial information with satellite technology. The log of all the areas travelled and points of interest are stored in the GPS and the data is downloaded into the GIS computer system. GIS is really a mapping program that has information tied to any given point on the map in a series of layers which you can choose.

For example: When I was in Guyana, I ran my GPS unit the entire inland flight to the destination in the savannah. From that point on, every hike, canoe trip that I took I logged the route on the GPS. Every significant wildlife observation was also logged as a point. When I was finished the trip, I loaded all this data onto a map that documents every mode of transportation I used and all points of interest as well.

I could email you an example if you are interested.

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Verena Gerber

Location: Celestun

Posted: Mon Nov 14, 2005 1:19 am Post subject: GIS example

Hola Rod, yes, I would love an example via mail info@ecoparaiso.com. Thank you for all the trouble and your time.

Jeremy Garrett

Location: Vermont, USA

Posted: Mon Nov 14, 2005 9:33 am Post subject: Week #2 Synopsis

In Week #2 of the Interpretive Program Development topic, we saw some more specifics on various interpretive tools and tricks of the trade. Remember, there are just a few more days left to participate!

George Duffy felt that geo-caching holds much potential as an interpretive tool and destination magnet, with many hikers using a GPS unit for aid in orientation. He maintained that a good guide is one of the most crowd-pleasing features of any travel experience, but that guides are generally poorly paid and underappreciated until after the fact. He posed that maybe we need to start nature guide critics like restaurant critics or movie critics to create demand for good guides.

Jeremy Garrett questioned whether consumers or outbound tour operators will pay more for guiding services, and wondered who offers the best guide training programs.

Theresa Southam spoke of guides who are servicing wealthy individuals by building personalized experiences for them, their families and their companies. This type of service is well-paid and engaging since it is different every time. The North American Association for Environmental Education provides good guide training.

George Duffy confirmed that good guides can simply demand and get more money from clients, or shop their services around. He felt it was reasonable to expect that people will pay more for great guides, citing expensive tours hosted by some perceived expert (e.g. local celebrity food critic who has gotten into guiding international tours). If an inbound operator positions itself as having the best guides, and delivers the goods, they could command more money from their outbound colleagues who buy their services, and vice versa – if you have a reputation for poor guides, you are not going to go too far. The key is to advise clients why it costs more and why it's worth more.

Verena Gerber employs an indigenous bilingual naturalist guide with a bachelors degree in ornithology who is very knowledgeable about local natural history and conducts their 12

ecological tours to the Special Biosphere Reserve of Celestun. Her experience however is that their guests are not willing to pay more for his expertise, so she wondered how to market and portray to the guests a good guide so that they are willing to pay more? Their other challenge is to present guests with information that they find interesting and can relate to; local knowledge of medical uses and anecdotes has been very useful.

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Rod Bilz suggested that clients need to take trip reminders. Photos are a good example but other creative options might be to record on a CD the sounds of a trip with a parabolic microphone, along with a checklist of the sounds contained on the CD. Another interesting product might be a personalized map developed with a GPS unit to track a person's adventures including hikes, treks, kayaking or other transport, and incorporating points of interest such as wildlife sightings, references for photos taken, etc. These are great ways of documenting a trip and are great marketing tools when clients show them to friends and perspective new clients.

Mary Finn

Location: US & Ecuador

Posted: Thu Nov 17, 2005 8:16 am Post subject: Interpreter training for communities

I couldn't agree more with Jeremy Garrett: a good interpreter will weave the story of the place into the overall message of the necessity for conservation and support of the local communities. Training is necessary so that your guides and interpretation are accurate, interesting and above all, fun -- no one takes a vacation so that they have to take a college course in biology.

I found that at least in the community ecotourism projects I've known in Ecuador, the community was convinced that to become guides they needed above all to memorize long lists of scientific and English names for the local flora and fauna. They tended to underestimate the value of their own, indigenous knowledge, including medicinal uses of plants, local legends and stories, and even local names for natural things, which were often more colorful and interesting (for ex, the 'pájaro asesino'- assassin bird; so called not because it's a predator, but rather because its call sounds like a 'wolf whistle', so he's a 'lady killer')

I wonder if others have found the same type of attitudes, and also, how much of this is also encouraged by the fact that most of those doing 'guide training' are usually biologists (and therefore may tend towards imparting their own knowledge and love of nomenclature?). Finally, it seems to me that the relative importance of biological nomenclature vs. 'stories' depends on the type of visitor – for example, hard-core birders may be much more interested in having a guide who knows all the names of the birds, whereas other visitors are much more interested in hearing compelling stories and anecdotes about the people as well as the nature of a place.

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Jeremy Garrett

Location: Vermont, USA

Posted: Thu Nov 17, 2005 12:19 pm

In my recent trip to Venezuela, I got to hear several perspectives on guiding and interpretation. The hard-core birders said it was vital for birdwatching trips for the guide to know all the names of the bird species -- common, regional and scientific.

But in talking with a "general" ecotourism guide, he decided not to delve into the specifics, even though he has a biology PhD. In fact, he may simply stick with one species, such as the Brazilian Pine, through the course of the trip, tying it directly back to people in ways they'd never considered.

So, the level of interpretation depends on the audience. If you notice that only one or two people out of 16 are actually listening to you, then a good guide would moderate his "high-brow" discussions and only point such things out to the interested parties, not subject to the whole group to it. I think that some guides are under the misconception that the more they talk and use "educated" jargon, the more they'll get paid. I disagree, and tend to reward better those guides who actually tailor themselves to the group; i.e. those who you become friends with by trip's end. No one likes a "know-it-all" -- we didn't in school, and we don't in the real world.

I would advise that all guides conduct some form of review, at least annually. Ask people what they liked/didn't like about the trip and ways you can improve. You'll never get better unless you ask. And if you really want the honest truth, take other guides along!

Triple Bottom Line Business Structures and Strategies

MODERATOR: Toby Bloom

TOPIC:

1. Evaluation of technical assistance needs
2. Build Operate and Transfer (BOT) agreements
3. Triple Bottom Line benchmarking and monitoring -- costs and approaches
4. Ecotourism certification
5. Philanthropy

Toby Bloom

Location: La Ceiba, Honduras

Posted: Tue Nov 01, 2005 1:54 pm Post subject: Re: Triple Bottom Line Business Structures and Strategies

I look forward to an interesting discussion over the next few weeks. I am especially interested to know your collective thoughts on certification- do you think it can work in terms of value adding, and what do you think is the future of certification?

Rod Bilz

Location: North Bay, Ontario, Canada

Posted: Tue Nov 01, 2005 9:22 pm Post subject: Ecotourism Certification

Does certification mean anything? Absolutely, but only when you target the correct niche market. If you want to look at a resort with an outstanding record, take a look at Casuarina Beach Club and their list of awards and certifications.

<http://www.casuarina.com/news/awards.html>

I met Loreto Duffy-Myers at the 6th Annual Sustainable Tourism Conference in Havana, Cuba a couple of years ago. Her experience is that it helped the resort immensely. She is the Environmental Manager there.

Their efforts towards certification not only made the resort more ecologically friendly, it initially saved the owners a lot in operating expenses. Now that they are targeting a knowledgeable and discerning clientele, they are able to reduce volume and increase revenues per person stay.

A lot of public education is required by the certification organizations and the tourism industry to help foster this client base. This is especially true in North America where this concept is relatively unknown to the masses.

Ron Mader

Location: Oaxaca, Mexico

Posted: Wed Nov 02, 2005 5:37 am Post subject: Mader Model

As to ecotourism or sustainable tourism certification, my belief is that we are 20 years too early. Most programs around the world have failed. We have seen no independent reviews, so most analysis depends on program coordinators explaining the brilliance of their work.

When it comes to defining what constitutes ecotourism or sustainable tourism, there is little consensus. And when it comes to developing global accreditation schemes, there's a growing demand to "stop the steamroller."

Where should we pay attention? I would start with national tourism websites in which we see almost no mention of ecotourism. Countries may indeed foster sustainable tourism initiatives, but they do a poor job of informing independent travelers or media (a theme I will pick up in the marketing topic). I would also ask whether we have reliable statistics about the 'ecotourism' market.

REFERENCES**Definitions**

<http://www.planeta.com/ecotravel/tour/definitions.html>

Rethinking Ecotourism Certification

<http://www.planeta.com/ecotravel/tour/certification.html>

Web Survey of Ecotourism

<http://www.planeta.com/ecotravel/tour/webeco.html>

Toby Bloom

Location: La Ceiba, Honduras

Posted: Wed Nov 02, 2005 10:08 am Post subject:

Mr. Bilz's example of Casuarina brings up another interesting question- Is it because of the *efforts needed to receive* certification that Casuarina was able to raise it's revenue, or because of the *certification itself*? It is difficult to prove a positive relationship between certification and point-of-sale increase in revenue.

How is ecotourism and/or sustainable tourism being promoted to the public? Ron said that national tourism websites rarely mention ecotourism. My experience at the grassroots level has been just the opposite, where every tourism operator labels its products as ecotourism! How do we strike a balance between these two ends of the continuum?

The majority of my experience with ecotourism and sustainable tourism has been working with people from the community who have or want to become active members of local sustainable tourism and ecotourism operations. I worked with projects attempting Build Operate and Transfer (BOT) transfers in the Ecuadorian and Peruvian Amazon, and provided technical assistance to private operators, NGOs and directly to communities in the Andean region of Peru. Currently I am providing technical assistance with national guide accreditation and nature guide training on a project in Honduras.

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I have seen very viable locally owned and operated operations that stand up to triple bottom line standards (check out Chalalan ecolodge in Bolivia), and I have seen products of donor agencies that seem destined to fail from the minute they are implemented, for various reasons (I'm sure we've all had this experience!). What is the key to building financially sustainable ecotourism operations, and what should our role be in providing technical assistance? Are BOT transfers the way to go (can anyone cite a successful example? the two I worked with were still in the pre-transfer phase), or is there a more viable model?

Toot Oostveen

Location: Honduras

Posted: Wed Nov 02, 2005 10:38 am Post subject: Re: Triple Bottom Line Business Structures and Strategies

I am also interested in the certification discussion. I worked some years ago on tourism certification for small tourism farms in Europe (for ECEAT). In Europe there are about 70 or 80 certification systems in tourism. Tourists hardly recognize them, some like Blue Flag are well known because the advantages for the tourists are clear. Most of them are very confusing and it seems that tourists don't ask for it, don't recognize the advantages (a research was done in The Netherlands). Certification systems seems to provide more advantages for business to business contacts or as a tool to enhance the performance and quality of the business itself. And most of all, it is often expensive to keep monitoring so the systems are not sustainable because tourists don't seem to be willing to pay.

Jamie Sweeting

Location: Washington D.C.

Posted: Wed Nov 02, 2005 10:42 am Post subject: Certification etc

Certification is all very well if it provides a business with a return on investment. Does the \$X spent getting certified get you \$X+ in additional sales? Or at least get you \$Y in savings from efficiencies etc. (and if \$Y is greater than \$X so much the better!)

My experience is that there is not yet a viable market and that the real reasons for pursuing certification schemes are more related to other core business issues such as efficiencies, product quality, risk management, insurance etc. In fact I have seen a growing trend of companies going through a certification program and then not bothering to re-certify because they aren't getting

the market benefits of the branding associated with the seal of approval...I wish this weren't the case.

I do see huge potential in B2B focused certifications -- thereby minimizing the efforts and costs of bulk purchasers (particularly cruise lines and tour operators) to be able to ensure that environmental and social issues, as well as health and safety are included in their contracting processes with their suppliers...

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George Duffy

Location: Black Diamond, AB

Posted: Wed Nov 02, 2005 4:39 pm Post subject: Triple Bottom Line

There is a really good body of knowledge on the website below for anyone hoping to create sustainable behavior in the public. Doug Mackenzie-Mohr PHd is the author.

<http://www.cbsm.com>

I think that another model for us to consider is the FSC label on sustainably harvested wood. I think the pressure on (and by) large guys like Home Depot etc can have quite large effects. These can create the critical mass required to change practices as well as educate the public.

And to bring in another institutional name what about Starbucks? Everyone likes to take shots at them, and no doubt there are some real issues, but Starbucks does at least make steps to walk the talk. What can we learn from them?

I would like to think that we may be able to partner with some non-traditional entities (like Starbucks) whose board of directors have clearly stated policies of operating sustainably. Can we leverage with some of these large corporations some how?

Megan Epler Wood

Location: Burlington, VT USA

Posted: Wed Nov 02, 2005 5:06 pm

Xavier Font and I completed a whole chapter titled *Sustainable Tourism Certification Marketing and its Contribution to SME Market Access* for the book Black, R.S. and Crabtree, A. (eds.) (2006) *Ecotourism Quality Control and Certification*. CABI Publishing, Wallingford, Oxon, UK.

I'm happy to share this with anyone who would like to write me directly to request it. We looked exhaustively at all the questions raised in this forum. This paper went through blind review and extensive re-editing based on review.

Here is the abstract.

The question of how well certification of sustainable tourism can contribute to building market access for business enterprises has important implications for how NGOs, donors, and

governments approach their support of sustainable tourism. Most literature to date has indicated that sustainable tourism certification has two benefits, 1) improving the quality of management and services of companies and the sustainability of enterprises, and 2) improving the market for certified enterprises. Policy makers have supported certification projects with the understanding that both of these benefits were realistic outcomes of certification projects, without reliable research at hand to validate these views. This article looks at the thesis that sustainable tourism certification has genuine market benefits. The authors conclude that while certification may be a valid method to involve businesses in quality and sustainability oversight of their businesses, there is insufficient evidence to suggest that certification of sustainable tourism will have market benefits and that such benefits should not be used to justify government, NGO or donor support of tourism certification.

We looked at both direct consumer market benefits and B2B benefits.

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Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Thu Nov 03, 2005 1:34 am

I just wanted to add to this very fruitful discussion on certification with things I learned in my project in Palawan (see www.sempnp.com for more details). In Northern Palawan, we did not even begin a certification process, but we brought up the idea several times and "started the ball rolling", for stakeholders to discuss whether they could create their own standards or join an established one (our technical recommendation). Apart from everything else, certification can:

- help define a product category, i.e. what you will sell. As a DMO, it's harder to sell products that are too heterogeneous. In this way, the PROCESS of pursuing any kind of certification is positive insofar as it makes different facilities and operators think what are their common standards - and indeed it often brings up the issue of standards for SMEs, in several cases for the first time...

- increase management capacity. The management exercise of examining the feasibility of getting certified stretched the management muscle of several businesses here. A couple of years ago I read in Fortune that the reason that something like 70% of FORTUNE 500 companies are ISO certified is not necessarily that a label gives them value, but that superior management capacity and the ability of keeping standards are closely correlated.

Even though at SEMP we knew that we would not have time to certify anyone, we started the process for these two reasons.

Neel Inamdar

Posted: Thu Nov 03, 2005 12:55 pm Post subject: Models, Strategies

Has anyone carried out a review of the types of agreements and structures that have been used over the years in different parts of the world, and tried to look at their successes and failures?

Some are Build, some are build-operate, and some are build-operate-transfer. Lots of different models out there - what's worked and why; what's failed and why?

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Toby Bloom

Location: La Ceiba, Honduras

Posted: Thu Nov 03, 2005 2:13 pm

Often it is the procedure, not the final product (whatever certification the entity is pursuing) that benefits an operator the most. Where I was speaking about revenue (often, the steps taken to become certified lead to reduced operating costs, rather than increases at point-of-sale). To this end, perhaps the goal should not be certification, but rather a framework for identifying goals, specifying the product being sold, how to develop an environmental policy for your company. Now if only such a "blueprint" existed and was relevant in various settings!

Let's touch on the issue of BOT transfers- Indeed, from my experience, this is a difficult procedure, specifically with the "T" in BOT. Involving local community members in the operation is often very successful, but I think the transfer is the stumbling point. In fact, I would argue that this is why sustainability is so elusive, not just in ecotourism, but in all sustainable international development. As I mentioned, the two projects that I worked with that were in the process of the BOT transfer were either very far off from the actual transfer date (so it was difficult to judge how successful it would be in 10 years), or they were extremely close to the transfer (2 years) and sorely lacking in transfer of management skills, which I would argue is the key to a successful transfer! I have never seen a review (nor a set of guidelines) for this model, but it would definitely give us some insight as to how to improve and/or increase probability of success for this model.

Finally, let's discuss partnerships with big names... I agree that these partnerships go a long way in pressuring responsible behavior, as well as educating the public. Still, at Home Depot, sustainably harvested wood costs more, and at Starbucks, the fair trade coffee is not displayed with the rest of the coffee- you have to request it specifically (of course, I live in Honduras, so it's been a while since I went to a Home Depot or Starbucks...)- but you have to start somewhere! The challenge is that in tourism, I am not aware of any industry giant that is recognized by the public and widely accessible to the average consumer (aside from online).

I recently did a search for a sustainable travel agency, and couldn't find any. There are tour operators such as Lindblad and others that sell responsible travel packages, but I haven't found any traditional-style travel agencies that sell a variety of operators, countries, and products that ONLY sell sustainable travel. So perhaps the next step could be something along these lines?

Megan Epler Wood

Location: Burlington, VT USA

Posted: Thu Nov 03, 2005 4:22 pm

For those of us interested in corporate monitoring. There are a number of other approaches I am very interested in trying out.

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First of all, I think we have a lot to learn from the Corporate Social Responsibility movement and also from the Global Reporting Initiative. It has the benefits of helping to systematize and monitor corporate performance while moving through improvements in management already discussed. And the great thing about it is that it is a global system that is accepted worldwide as a system for corporate monitoring.

I am presently coordinating CSR discussions with colleagues here in Vermont.- We plan to give a panel talk next year at our Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility Conference. I also have worked with the World Bank CSR department looking at how tourism can be incorporated into this global system via a study in Cambodia. I studied extensive documents that they had on hand on how tourism stacks up to other industries. We are really the only industry not extensively involved in this global reporting system. Why not? CSR advocates are actually quite confused about why tourism does not join the fold.

Toby Bloom

Location: La Ceiba, Honduras

Posted: Fri Nov 04, 2005 9:54 am

I don't think that tourism hasn't "joined the fold" of CSR- In fact, the Business Enterprise for Sustainable Tourism (BEST) initiative focused on just that. this is the a statement taken from a press release that I came across:

BEST strives to create awareness of and appreciation for the value of sustainable travel practices among four constituencies: business, travelers, communities, and the media. BEST serves as a resource to the travel and tourism industry in the area of sustainable travel. BEST identifies, analyzes, and encourages exemplary business practices that contribute to the natural, social, economic, and cultural environments of host communities.

I think Megan touched on an important point, though. How can we motivate small operators to do CSR reporting, and how do we make it economically possible for them? Is there a widely accessible guideline?

Jamie Sweeting

Location: Washington D.C.

Posted: Fri Nov 04, 2005 4:27 pm Post subject: CSR Reporting and Tourism

I had the pleasure of working with Giulia Carbone and Oliver Hillel (both Ex-UNEP) and the Tour Operators' Initiative for Sustainable Tourism Development on a program to develop CSR reporting guidelines for the tour operator sector back in 2002. At the time members of TOI ranged from multi-billion dollar corporations to niche market inbound operators. TOI ended up partnering with CERES and the Global Reporting Initiative to create the first sector guidelines for

a service industry. This was a monumental project many international meetings and lots of hard work later - a tour operator sector supplement was born...please find it at:
<http://www.toinitiative.org/reporting/documents/TourOperatorsSupplementNovember2002.pdf>

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Jamie Sweeting

Location: Washington D.C.

Posted: Fri Nov 04, 2005 4:30 pm Post subject: BEST

Toby - FYI, alas BEST closed its doors a couple of years ago now. Some of their work has been continued by The International Ecotourism Society and the International Tourism Partnership.

Megan Epler Wood

Location: Burlington, VT USA

Posted: Sat Nov 05, 2005 3:10 pm

es, when I undertook the World Bank CSR consultancy, I was given detailed comparisons of advances in every industry. I did see the wonderful work done by UNEP with the Tour Operators Initiative.

But, the detailed comparative reports I read, which I can pull out if anyone is interested, compared many industries head to head in term of CSR reporting and found that the tourism industry was **by far** the slowest to adopt CSR reporting.

What I realized was that CSR reporting with the international GRI guidelines that now exist could potentially be a crucial tool for working with the tourism industry in future on issues of quality control and monitoring.

Mike Robbins

Location: Toronto & Collingwood

Posted: Sun Nov 06, 2005 3:32 pm

I am a long time believer in the benefits of certification for certain types of products including ecotourism and Aboriginal cultural tourism. A number of years ago (1997) we were part of a team of consultants working for Indian and Northern Affairs in Canada to develop an inventory of Aboriginal tourism products across Canada and a draft Aboriginal cultural certification program. The program has unfortunately never been implemented. At the time we completed case studies on other existing and successful certification programs including the authentic Inuit art program in Canada's north and the Children's Camp certification program in Ontario Canada, amongst others. We also completed a case study on the Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program in Australia (NEAP). I have been a long time member of the Australia Ecotourism Association and have watched with great interest the development, and the problems and successes with NEAP. It is a good model and places strong emphasis on marketing to the consumer to enable them to make informed decisions.

Another less formal example can be found in "The New Key to Costa Rica". Although it is not a formal certification program the categorization within this travel book does provide travellers with accurate insight into ecotourism products in Costa Rica. I have traveled to Costa Rica several times in the recent past with my children and have stayed in ecolodges such as Bosque del Cabo, Selva Bananito and Selva Verde. I feel the Costa Rican government sustainability program (ICT Certification of Sustainable Tourism) does not provide a useful categorization and is misleading. So in my travels I have turned to "The New Key" to provide information on ecolodges in Costa Rica.

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Toby Bloom

Location: La Ceiba, Honduras

Posted: Mon Nov 07, 2005 4:53 pm

I collaborated on a booklet that was just published last week, called "Beyond The Beach: Quick Reference Guide for Competing in the Sustainable Tourism Market." The PDF version and background info will be available to the public at www.chemonics.com in the next few weeks, and the content will be posted on the Triple Standards Working Group website, www.caudillweb.com/triplestandards, in the next few months. Paper versions are currently available in English, and the booklet will soon be translated into other languages. The booklet discusses sustainable tourism certification schemes, awards, codes of conduct, traveler guidelines, and resources. It is meant to be a primer for operators that are new to the concept of sustainable tourism.

Toot Oostveen

Location: Honduras

Posted: Mon Nov 07, 2005 6:35 pm Post subject: Re: CSR Reporting and Tourism

Recently, at the STEP (Sustainable Tourism for Poverty Elimination) seminar of WTO in Nicaragua, GTZ gave a very interesting presentation on a research they did among resorts in the Caribbean. For me it was amazing that for example in a Nicaraguan resort more than 95 % of the employees were recruited from Nicaragua and about 90% of the goods were locally provided and, last but not least, the amount of training provided to the employees is considerable higher than tourism employees of the same level receive in this country. It was not exactly a corporate responsibility investigation (and the research was not complete because a possible profit leakage was not investigated) but the positive influence of the resort on local economy and employment is much bigger than I could imagine. Anyone knows researches or figures on some corporate responsibility items of mega businesses like resorts?

Oliver Hillel

Location: Puerto Princesa, Philippines

Posted: Tue Nov 08, 2005 1:46 am

Not only can resorts do a lot for sustainability, particularly generating jobs in poor regions and contributing to resource management, but the scale they can take makes all efforts extremely

relevant. While at UNEP, we prepared a report on general sustainability of the tourism industry that can still be seen at http://www.unep.fr/outreach/wssd/contributions/sector_reports/sectors/tourism/tourism.htm. The possibilities are quite significant... But the resistances and challenges as well.

Just two tips for your further research:

- one of the resort chains leading corporate social responsibility efforts is Voyages, an Australian resort chain - have a look at <http://www.voyages.com.au/corporate/our-responsibilities/>. They published a Sustainability Report in 2004 with relevant statistics.
- One of the tourism professionals investigating this avenue is Klaus Lengefeld at GTZ in Germany - if he's not listening in, please contact him at Klaus.Lengefeld@gtz.de. Not sure if he already published anything on the issue, but he was planning to.

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Mike Robbins

Location: Toronto & Collingwood

Posted: Wed Nov 09, 2005 1:40 pm

I would like to draw attention to an excellent example of how to create a conservation-based economy on a large scale. An organization that I have a relationship with - Tides Canada (www.tidescanada.org) - is one of a number of environmental NGOs involved in a protecting the Great Bear Rainforest on Canada's west coast.

The Great Bear Rainforest in British Columbia is part of the largest intact, unprotected, coastal temperate rainforest remaining on the planet.

This magnificent land - 21 million acres (8.5 million hectares) of ancient cedar and rushing water, situated on the B.C. coast, in from the tip of Vancouver Island and north to include Haida Gwaii -sustains 20% of the world's wild salmon, hosts six million migratory birds, unique wolf populations, grizzly and black bears as well as the 'spirit bear'; the white Kermode bear unique to the region.

For over ten thousand years the mountains, forest, fjords and waterways of this land have been home to some of Canada's First Nations. At one time there were 45 distinct dialects spoken in the region. Today an estimated eighteen to twenty thousand First Nations people live, work and raise their families in what has come to be known as The Great Bear Rainforest. They make up about half the population of the BC central coast and many live in small coastal communities accessible only by sea.

This land and its people have emerged, relatively intact, from more than a century of resource exploitation, primarily because of the inaccessible terrain.

A decade long effort to negotiate protection for the Great Bear Rainforest reached a milestone several years ago when a framework agreement between first nations, the federal and provincial governments, and environmental organizations was achieved.

This agreement represents one of North America's largest conservation undertakings and includes full protection of over 30% of the land. It also includes land use agreements between first nations and the government of British Columbia establishing ecosystem based management practices for the whole region. This is an approach to land use ensuring that only sustainable development will take place.

Conservation here will be more than a wilderness agreement. To be successful conservation must protect eco systems, respect First Nations' cultures and strengthen local economies and communities.

A key element of these historic land use agreements has been the creation of the Coast Opportunities Funds – a conservation financing program developed through a remarkable collaborative process involving First Nations, environmentalists, philanthropists and government.

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The Coast Opportunities Funds will consist of two distinct entities; a registered Canadian charity responsible for managing an endowment fund for the purpose of conservation and a not- for-profit society responsible for managing an economic development fund. The first will be created from privately raised funds and the second from federal and provincial government contributions. The provincial government has pledged \$30 million in public funding for economic development and the federal government is considering matching that pledge..

The capital campaign to raise private funds for conservation is underway in Canada and the United States. The goal is \$60 million.

The Nature Conservancy in the US and Tides Canada Foundation in Canada have undertaken this capital campaign.

The Great Bear web site is www.savethegreatbear.org

Toby Bloom

Location: La Ceiba, Honduras

Posted: Wed Nov 09, 2005 3:05 pm

Triple bottom line biz strategies summary for week 1

- Certification- the process of certification has helped several operators to better define their product, lower operating costs, develop better business management, and reduce their impacts on the environment. Several participants also agreed that Certification systems seem to provide more advantages for business to business contacts. However, participants agreed that it is the process itself and not the actual seal of accreditation that is responsible for the change. Rod Bilz noted that certification itself can be helpful, but only when you target a niche market, and that a lot of public education is required by the certification organizations and the tourism

industry to help foster this client base. This is especially true in North America where this concept is relatively unknown to the masses. Other drawbacks of certification cited by participants were a lack of uniformity (too many types of certification) and high cost associated with monitoring to maintain the certification body – in terms of its own economic feasibility. It was also noted that there are no valid market research studies that indicate that certification can be directly linked to building business market access and that donors seeking to support certification need to consider it as a tool for quality control but not for introducing SME products, especially in developing countries where small business is dependent on support for viable market access approaches, into the marketplace.

- BOT Transfers- We briefly touched on this topic. Participants agreed that this model is compelling, but there has been very little research done on the success of these projects, whether individually or compared with other models. None of the participants cited examples of projects with BOT transfers that had completed the whole buy-operate-transfer process.
- CSR- CSR reporting can help systematize and monitor corporate performance while moving through improvements in management, but the tourism industry has not “joined the fold” with respect to these reporting systems. While UNEP and CI worked substantially to create CSR reporting guidelines via the Responsible Tour Operator's Initiative partnering with CERES, <http://www.toinitiative.org/reporting/documents/TourOperatorsSupplementNovember2002.pdf> to date these guidelines have not been used for any known tourism industry reporting project according to CERES representatives.

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Megan Epler Wood

Location: Burlington, VT USA

Posted: Wed Nov 09, 2005 3:57 pm

I would like to add just a little more background to the summary which reflect the intensive research that has been done now on how much certification influences product selection by the consumer (in tourism and in other products as well). I provided an abstract to the article I wrote with Xavier Font on this topic previously (who is one of the leading researchers on this topic). I would like to offer a key quote from the chapter on this matter as part of our overall summary on this topic.

Ecotourism certification starts from the assumption that the sustainability message will be a unique selling proposition that will give certified products a competitive advantage through better product positioning..

Proponents of sustainable and ecotourism certification suggest that consumer demand for certification will take time to build.

a according to Amos Bien of The International Ecotourism Society (TIES). His recent summary of research on marketing for sustainable and ecotourism certification suggests that consumer demand takes between 8-15 years (sometimes as long as 20) to develop. Bien states that, “safety,

quality and price needs must be satisfied before a consumer will consider other factors.” (Bien 2005: 17).

Mike Robbins

Location: Toronto & Collingwood

Posted: Sat Nov 12, 2005 12:33 pm

I am concerned that we are dismissing the benefits of certification - just because there is a lack good research to quantify the benefits of ecotourism certification. Why not approach the tourism research community to push for good research so we can develop research-based programs? We lack good research to quantify the benefits of ecotourism period, or to even characterize who is looking for an ecotourism experience – so should we dismiss the whole ecotourism concept?

Here are a few interesting tourism related certification programs that we have looked at recently in our work for Native tourism clients.

Toi iho Maori Made – (www.toiho.com) – a registered trade mark used to promote and sell authentic quality Maori arts and crafts and to authenticate exhibitions and performances of Maori arts by Maori artists, was developed by the Te Waka Toi, the Maori Arts Board of Creative New Zealand (government organization) in 2002

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Respecting our culture tourism development program www.rocprogram.com – launched in 2003 this is an accreditation program for authentic Aboriginal operators complementing the Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program (NEAP www.neap.com.au/) administered by the Australian Ecotourism Association.

The National Indigenous Advisory Association Label of Authenticity – a national certification trademark to be placed on art of cultural products and services to denote genuine Aboriginal of Torres Strait Islander origin – www.niaaa.com/label.html

In order to protect the integrity of authentic Inuit art the Canadian government some years ago registered the igloo trademark to be used to identify authentic Inuit carvings and art. The igloo tag and stickers can only be acquired by artists themselves or their distributors and agents.

These programs are all beginning to work as they were intended.

There are many benefits to these programs:

Help to protect the integrity of authentic products and experiences – this is a major issue for indigenous peoples

Provide a marketing advantage and enable consumer choice – we don't need research to demonstrate that an informed consumer choice can make a difference – look at the huge growth in organic food retailing (certified organic)

Provide consistent quality standards – an operator going through the self completion booklet for the Australian Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program learns how to make their business more sustainable even if they do not qualify for NEAP certification at the end

There is now so much mis-use and abuse of the terms ecotourism and ecolodges that we have to do something to put some teeth back into the concept of ecotourism. I believe some type of certification is one important means of doing this. There may be other approaches too, such as award programs. But until we begin to put some teeth into the concept we are losing the ecotourism opportunity.

Many of the fishing and hunting lodges in Ontario are beginning to diversify into ecotourism because the hunting and fishing markets have matured and are showing signs of decline. The provincial government and NGOs are promoting ecotourism as an effective means for these operators to diversify. In my opinion the markets interested in consumptive fishing and hunting are very different from the markets interested in true ecotourism experiences. Their use of the terminology is just further confusing the tourism industry and the markets. The term is being reduced to any activity or program that deals with nature in a non-consumptive manner. Adding a spring nature walk to the summer fishing and fall hunting program calendar of a lodge that is anything but a model of sustainability is not ecotourism.

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One of our clients is considering building an ecolodge with a focus on silent outdoor sports but is hesitant to use the term ecolodge because he fears the government does not fully understand the true essence of the concept. How then does he differentiate his development from the myriad other lodges and resorts in Ontario and Canada to the lending institutions, government agencies and the broader tourism industry, let alone to his target markets. And yet what he is planning to do is truly pushing the sustainability envelope and deserves attention.

Let's take a close look at the certification programs that are working and find out how and why and then apply that learning to create some consistent ecotourism certification programs as a means of putting some teeth into the concept of ecotourism. Otherwise we may never fully capitalize on the benefits that we know are inherent in the concept of ecotourism.

George Duffy

Location: Black Diamond, AB

Posted: Mon Nov 14, 2005 12:27 pm Post subject: Certification

I just got my supply of annual brochures this year and for the first time I bought 100% recycled paper, used a company that was digital, so no copper plates to make or destroy, no inks being washed. I have a little audit on my brochure showing how many trees I saved and how much less greenhouse gas I produced, how much less solid and liquid waste was produced, how much less water was consumed. For this effort I am rewarded with a 15% increase in my cost.

I could list all sorts of other things we do, but you get the idea. Now, who is going to pay for certification? The dilemma facing most of us is that not only do we have to be good, now someone wants us to pay them to tell us we are being good.

Certified organic farmers do not get higher prices for their products, generally, yet you and I pay a lot more to buy them. The cost is not the goods, but the detailed process of certification.

My company is positioned as an ecotour company. Just using that word is like a red flag to anyone who is at all acquainted with the "green" world of products. The people who care, are scrutinizing my product, and unlike many other products like grapes or Inuit art, if they buy my product, they can ascertain to a large extent whether it eco because they become part of the experience. That is one significant difference in this type of product: it is self revealing. Granted there are many aspects people cannot ascertain like how many compact fluorescents a lodge uses or whether there is any grey water recycling etc.

Now, if you are talking about the relative value of labelling with the purpose to create a brand recognition, I would see value in that. For example like a Quality Inn or Hyatt. A label that stands for something of recognizable value. That is why I personally like the Swedish, "Nature's Best". The phrase, to me, gets to the heart of the message we are trying to convey without getting preachy and complicated. It say's there may be other nature products, but this is best.

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There are other benefits to creating standards: improving skills, creating good operating practices and I wholeheartedly agree that these can't be dismissed. I do agree we need to have something which clearly differentiates our product, but certification will not go anywhere until there is a demonstrable, credible, long term marketing plan. If there was, I would be more inclined to support it, even without the research to back up the proposition that people actually care, because we need a brand identity in this business to clearly separate us from adventure travel, where at the moment we are now more or less lumped in with.

Last point, I made it earlier in the marketing discussion, ecotourism cannot be all things to all stakeholders. Ecotourism is nature based travel. To take it that one hyphenated step beyond risks making this already difficult to define category more or less useless.

Mike Robbins

Location: Toronto & Collingwood

Posted: Mon Nov 14, 2005 2:57 pm

Kingfisher Bay Resort in Australia has advanced accreditation under the Australian NEAP program. They proudly post the logo on their web site. The owners of the resort have been very involved in the development and implementation of the NEAP program in Australia over the past 5 years or so. I don't think they would be part of the program if they were not getting real benefits from the extensive marketing that is done for the NEAP program by Ecotourism Australia and others including their national DMO.

Secondly I disagree with your comment about ecotourism just being nature-based travel. There is an awful lot of nature based tourism out there that would not be considered ecotourism. Ecotourism principles have to do with environmental conservation, maximizing benefits to local communities and people, protecting local cultures, educating visitors and turning something beneficial back to the environment and or the local community or indigenous culture. Without these principles ecotourism is nothing.

George Duffy

Location: Black Diamond, AB

Posted: Mon Nov 14, 2005 6:08 pm Post subject: Triple Bottom Line

I never meant that ecotourism is just nature travel without the various attributes you mention. What I was getting at was that ecotourism is primarily for the purposes of having a nature tour experience, not a community experience, not an urban experience, not a rural experience yet those themes seem to keep encroaching on ecotourism and that somehow ecotourism can be or should be tweaked to include a broader meaning. I think it should be narrow and specific.

I also think we may expect too much from ecotourism. It is never going to be fair to all community members. Some will like it others won't. Same as in my little town. Half the businesses want more tourists, half think we should be trying to better meet local needs. Can of worms, someone said.

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Your example on my site of Kingfisher Bay Resort is good. You should understand they are not a client of mine but rather I of them. I am wholesaling their ecolodge packages and tours. I selected them. And it is true that I combed the NEAP site looking for some good product. But I doubt seriously that there are that many other tour companies on the planet that even know NEAP exists. Never the less, NEAP may be a marketing success story.

If they *are* providing marketing services, that is precisely what I am talking about. I see little value in being certified without having marketing support. For curiosity I will try and email Kingfisher Bay Resort and ask them if the NEAP system provides marketing benefits and how much it adds to their sales or bottom line. Let's see what they say.

Ron Mader

Location: Oaxaca, Mexico

Posted: Mon Nov 14, 2005 7:37 pm Post subject: More on NEAP

In Planeta.com's 2003 Marketing of Ecotourism Conference, one of the participants reported: "Recently I interviewed over 100 customers of tourism operations which have NEAP accreditation. Not one client indicated that he or she had chosen the tour because of the accreditation of the product. Almost all clients were not even aware of the accreditation scheme." <http://www.planeta.com/ecotravel/tour/marketingcert.html>

I do not know if the situation has improved. There has been no communication between NEAP and Planeta.com or others reporting on NEAP developments.

Toby Bloom

Location: La Ceiba, Honduras

Posted: Tue Nov 15, 2005 10:57 am

This week, the conversation started off focusing on the benefits and challenges of Resorts developing in generating jobs and contributing to resource management. Toot Oostveen shared with us an example cited at a WTO conference, where approximately 90% of labor and goods at a resort in Nicaragua were procured locally. Those interested in further research should check out Voyages, an Australian resort chain, or could contact Klaus Lengefeld at GTZ in Germany, Klaus.Lengefeld@gtz.de.

An excellent example of how to create a conservation-based economy on a large scale can be found with Tides Canada, along with several other NGOs, who work to protect The Great Bear Rainforest in British Columbia, home to some of Canada's First Nations. A few years ago, a framework agreement between first nations, the federal and provincial governments, and environmental organizations was achieved. This agreement represents one of North America's largest conservation undertakings and includes full protection of over 30% of the land. It also includes land use agreements between first nations and the government.

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The conversation returned once again to certification, with my announcement of the publishing of " Beyond The Beach: Quick Reference Guide for Competing in the Sustainable Tourism Market." The PDF version and background info will be available to the public at www.chemonics.com in the next few weeks, and the content will be posted on the Triple Standards Working Group website, www.caudillweb.com/triplestandards. There was also concern that the forum was dismissing the benefits of certification, just because there is a lack good research to quantify the benefits of ecotourism certification. He felt that the approach should be to approach the tourism research community to push for good research so we can develop research-based programs. Certification programs that his organization has looked at recently in their work for Native tourism clients include: www.toiio.com, www.rocprogram.com, www.neap.com.au , and www.niaaa.com/label.html.

George Duffy presented the perspective of a company that could potentially seek certification.. George believed more in the value of labeling with the purpose to create brand recognition. He felt that certification will not go anywhere until there is a demonstrable, credible, long term marketing plan, and that the industry (ecotourism) needs a brand identity to clearly separate it from adventure travel, where at the moment it is now more or less lumped in with.

Mike Robbins

Location: Toronto & Collingwood

Posted: Tue Nov 15, 2005 11:07 am

The NEAP program in Australia was launched back in 1996. The following are the benefits promoted to prospective members. Nature tourism and ecotourism certification provides benefits to operators, managers, communities and travelers:

- criteria to assist operators plan and develop their nature tourism and/or ecotourism product
- a guide to assist operators implement the principles of ecologically sustainable development
- an opportunity for operators to continually improve performance to a standard recognised as best practice
- a recognised logo for operators to use in their marketing material
- a recognised means for protected area managers and travellers to identify genuine nature tourism and ecotourism operators
- a tool for protected area managers to encourage improved practices that lead to less environmental impact
- a tool to help local communities determine a mix of tourism activities that maximises benefits and minimises negative impacts
- an essential educational and information tool.
- The Eco Certification Program includes Membership of Ecotourism Australia at the applicable level based of gross turnover.

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I know the Australian DMOs like Tourism Queensland (and others) have been continually researching the impacts of NEAP and the general market awareness and operator satisfaction levels with the program. I just quickly went into the Tourism Queensland site (<http://www.tq.com.au/industry/sustainable-tourism/research.cfm>) where they have downloadable versions of some of the past research. No doubt they have more current research but here are key findings from the year 2000.

“Results from the consumer survey indicate NEAP is already providing operations with a competitive advantage and has the potential to provide greater advantage if it is marketed effectively. Most people who knew that the operation was accredited before visiting say that accreditation had an impact on their decision to visit. After being given a description of the NEAP and its purpose, most people also indicated that they would be willing to select and pay more for accredited ecotourism products in the future.”

“The results from the NEAP industry survey indicate the ecotourism operators who are accredited with the NEAP are generally satisfied with the program and its initiatives. Overall the NEAP is perceived to be a worthwhile initiative, with the capacity to help businesses to function in a more environmentally friendly way and the capacity to provide businesses with a competitive advantage.”

Much has been done since 2000 to strengthen the marketing of NEAP products and broaden awareness with visitors to and within Australia. They have partnerships with Qantas Airlines and Tourism Australia to name a few, in this regard. Here is another interesting application of the NEAP program: http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/corp_site/key_issues/tourism/certification.html

Toby Bloom

Location: La Ceiba, Honduras

Posted: Tue Nov 15, 2005 11:26 am Post subject: Re: Triple Bottom Line

George Duffy wrote: ecotourism is primarily for the purposes of having a nature tour experience, not a community experience, not an urban experience, not a rural experience yet those themes seem to keep encroaching on ecotourism and that somehow ecotourism can be or should be tweaked to include a broader meaning. I think it should be narrow and specific.

I also think we may expect too much from ecotourism. It is never going to be fair to all community members. Some will like it others won't. Same as in my little town. Half the businesses want more tourists, half think we should be trying to better meet local needs.

I agree that the definition of ecotourism should be narrow and specific, but it depends on whose definition of ecotourism you are using as to whether community, rural, or even urban experiences enter into the definition. TIES defines ecotourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well- being of the local people." In this definition, community experience can indeed be a part of the definition.

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In the 2002 Geotourism study by the Travel Industry of America (<http://www.tia.org/Pubs/GeotourismPhaseFinal.PDF>), the executive summary states that:

...Nearly two thirds agree (61%) that their travel experience is better when the destination preserves its natural, historic, and cultural sites and attractions. Over half (53%) of travelers agree that their travel experience is better when they have learned as much as possible about their destination's customs, geography, and culture.

While George may choose a more narrow definition of ecotourism for his products, I would argue that community experiences definitely have a place in the world of ecotourism. Finally, I believe that ecotourism falls under the larger umbrella of sustainable tourism, which can be generally defined as tourism that 1) protects the local environment, 2) gives benefits to the local community, and 3) preserves local culture.

Finally, let's define "fair" in relationship to ecotourism. We need to recognize that "fair" doesn't mean that everyone gets what they want 100% of the time. "Fair" means that those affected by ecotourism have a chance to voice their opinions and be heard when decisions are being made. In this sense, I think *ecotourism should always be fair.*

Megan Epler Wood

Location: Burlington, VT USA

Posted: Wed Nov 16, 2005 8:37 am

I want to be certain folks are aware that extensive research has been done on the question of certification and its validity in the marketplace and as a quality control mechanism. There have been 2 large Ford Foundation grants associated with this as well as a \$3 million IDB MIF project. In fact, this area of our field has had a great deal of research funding associated with it. It is my thought that perhaps the information we need on this topic already does exist.

In my posts, I referenced a few of the many references on this topic. But of course it is easy to find more at the websites for TIES and Rainforest Alliance. Research continues in this field with excellent funding resources, and I have sought to track it closely, and use that experience in my own work.

Ron Mader

Location: Oaxaca, Mexico

Posted: Wed Nov 16, 2005 9:38 am Post subject: Opening the doors

I agree 100% with Toby's statement: "'Fair' means that those affected by ecotourism have a chance to voice their opinions and be heard when decisions are being made. In this sense, I think ecotourism should always be fair."

That said, and at the risk of keeping the can of worms open (!), my follow-up question is what we expect of development agencies and donors working in this field. Do we expect them to make consulting opportunities and programs known to the public?

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Frequently, I have been invited to closed door meetings, and from time to time, I attend. Declarations are written and lists compiled of 'things to do' though lack of continuity and lack of funding doom the initiatives from the start.

What bothers me is that so many of these meetings do not include public announcements and documentation of work undertaken. If there were an incentive for such participation, perhaps things would be better.

If we wish to hear from affected stakeholders, we need to conduct ourselves in a manner in which we have greater and more creative opportunities to engage in constructive dialogues. Incorporating feedback from travelers and locals is critical to the long-term success of these ventures. If anyone has examples of this works or doesn't work, please let us know as I would will include a lists of dos and don'ts in my 2006 presentations.

Mike Robbins

Location: Toronto & Collingwood

Posted: Wed Nov 16, 2005 1:08 pm

Sorry to harp on certification but I believe it is an important tool. Megan was quoted in previous postings as follows:

"The authors conclude that while certification may be a valid method to involve businesses in quality and sustainability oversight of their businesses, there is insufficient evidence to suggest that certification of sustainable tourism will have market benefits and that such benefits should not be used to justify government, NGO or donor support of tourism certification.

I want to be certain folks are aware that extensive research has been done on the question of certification and its validity in the marketplace and as a quality control mechanism.

But of course it is easy to find more at the websites for TIES and Rainforest Alliance."

I downloaded a recent TIES report (April 2005) completed in association with CESD and here are some direct quotes re the benefits of certification:

""About half of all German tourists would use an ecolabel, if available, in the choice of a vacation"

"...easy access to information on all products in Europe with certified environmental quality (ecolabels) was of peculiar importance to them (German travellers)"

"Danish tourists staying at least one night in Green key certified hotels were willing to pay extra for hotels with eco labeling."

"Certification per se will rarely become a reason for the purchase of a tourism product or service. However, the ingredients of the programs – assurance that what is promised can be delivered – play an extremely important role in the minds of consumers."

"Participation in voluntary environmental programs may allow companies to gain differentiation advantages that yield higher prices or higher sales."

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This report seems to suggest that certification can and does work if designed and marketed properly. It also points out the need for more current research on existing programs like NEAP – where the research referenced dates back to 2000. If there is good primary research out there that suggests otherwise let's share it.

Too often we only hear of the marketing advantage and environmental audit benefits of certification. There are many other equally as important benefits:

- Provide credibility for small remote operators with the international travel trade – this is a particularly important issue for Aboriginal/indigenous cultural and ecotourism products – primary research we have done clearly identifies this as an issue for small remote ecotourism (including Aboriginal) products
- Ensure that consumer expectations are met – i.e. like the many hotel grading (certification systems) throughout the world do with respect to hotel quality
- Protecting cultural integrity – one of the major principles of ecotourism that is sometimes overlooked is the preservation of local indigenous culture which is equally important as environmental conservation
- A valuable approach to joint/partnership marketing helping to create a louder voice in the marketplace
- A tool to facilitate continuous improvement

There are no doubt other benefits as well.

Megan Epler Wood

Location: Burlington, VT USA

Posted: Thu Nov 17, 2005 7:49 pm

Working in a country like Honduras, all I can say is that there are so many important issues to confront, and that our ability to build competitiveness has to take priority in my view in the private sector. The industry here is 95% small or micro with owners who are presently working day and night to stay in business - whatever we recommend must help them deliver a product that works well in the marketplace in a relatively short period of time. I also see that nearly all the communities here have had little exposure to tourism yet, and they need proper systems to decide how and if to enter this field. And as for the protected areas- they need to be able to gain from the tourists who are arriving (most of whom are not paying entry fees) while trying to make sure reasonable infrastructure is in place. These are urgent priorities, and there are many more I have not mentioned, and I want to work to make sure our priorities as a field are in the right order when offering assistance in DEVELOPING countries where there is really a different set of needs and priorities than in countries where tax dollars and government programs are covering a great deal of expense for developing ambitious programs that could not be considered in a place like Honduras.

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Mike Robbins

Location: Toronto & Collingwood

Posted: Fri Nov 18, 2005 9:54 am

I would like to make a number of concluding recommendations:

1. Ecotourism is a good concept and we do need to work to minimize the misuse and abuse of the term through education and by example. We all need to work towards pushing the envelope with regards to the principles of ecotourism including:
 - o Making a smaller ecological footprint with new tourism development
 - o Ensure more and more benefits go to local communities and local people
 - o Work to protect cultural integrity of indigenous cultures
 - o Educate tourists about how they can make more sustainable choices and become more socially and environmentally conscious in their lives and travels
2. We should work to showcase best practice models – they may not be applicable to other situations but they should stimulate creative thinking and give us all new insights into how we can push the envelope with our projects and ecotourism initiatives.
3. We need to continue to educate the public sector and the NGOs and the private sector about ecotourism and how it can be utilized as a powerful conservation and cultural preservation tool while at the same time bringing needed economic development potential to often remote and/or rural areas.

4. Don't give up on certification – there are too many good successful models of grading and/or certification programs in the international tourism industry not to consider it as one of a number of important tools in ecotourism development and marketing.

5. We should not impose tourism and/or ecotourism on communities. We should educate about the pros and cons of tourism and then enable communities to make their own decision. As consultants we should be the facilitators contributing our expertise to helping those communities that do have an informed desire for tourism and ecotourism.

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Developing Infrastructure for Sustainable Tourism

Moderator: Oliver Hillel

Week 1:

We started with Neel's example of Shompola in Kenya, where the private sector, NGOs and government partnered with communities to generate a winning product with a BOT system. Infrastructure, in this case, was a public investment matching efforts from communities and operators.

I pointed out that larger scale tourism would be key to make social and environmental benefits relevant, raised the need for local funding counterparts and asked what critical infrastructure is needed for sustainable tourism/ecotourism.

Antonio asked us to consider infrastructure from a wider "user's" point of view - the type and amount of infrastructure required should be related to the direction the community wants to go. Ecotourism and ecotourism cannot be separated from overall sustainability at a regional level (nor can it shoulder the responsibility alone...). Therefore, ecotourism cannot be considered alone - we need sustainable cities, linked to rural areas and eco-destinations. Building green is a regional issue, and planning at this scale is essential. Alanna contributed the idea that systems thinking should be the basis for infrastructure planning (encouraging donors to consider multi-infrastructure planning and not isolated needs), and she pointed out that locally controlled technology is needed in relation to infrastructure and utilities. She gave a good example of how road development cannot be separated from the infrastructure requirements for maintenance of the road, such as erosion control. I then shared my concerns on limitations experienced in the field (in this case in the Philippines, but the situation is arguably similar in many other developing destinations) on how much these concepts can be applied, and asked for suggestions on how to overcome them.

Andres and Michelle of Black Sheep Inn shared how they developed this award-winning product with basic infrastructure (access through a road with a bus a week, water and electricity) and by involving communities and thinking destination-wide. I ended up by asking them to consider destination-level next steps in terms of infrastructure needs for sustainable tourism development.

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Week 2:

In our second (and part of the third) week, we began with my note that it's difficult to define at which precise moment a public agency should invest: if they respond to existing (over)demand only, you allow the damage of a period of overdevelopment and environmental deterioration (and this is the most common occurrence). On the other hand, if you develop infrastructure based on expected future demand, planning too far ahead (and particularly being overoptimistic), there's the risk of overbuilding the infrastructure beyond the actual future development level, making the investment unfeasible and costly to local taxpayers.

Ron then brought up the issue that developing trails, whose facilities also are a public infrastructure, can be a good way to distribute benefits and support sustainable tourism, with examples in Northern Laos and the Southern Queensland Wildlife Trail. I posted some references on the need for adequate mapping for infra planning based on an example from India, and on the use of existing infrastructure re-engineered for ecotourism, with examples from EU's META project which proposes eco-renovation of existing accommodation along Europe's Atlantic coast, unused school buildings as “gites d'etappe” for trails in Madagascar and tourism railways in Brazil. Jerry A-Kum of Suriname reminded us that infrastructure also includes the actual tourism facilities (hotels), so that this topic should consider both public and private sustainable investment promotion for infrastructure.

Finally, Rick McLeod gave us some very good examples of how two projects with indigenous communities in Canada dealt with infra needs, to which I posted some comments (and offered some UNEP publications as references on sustainable resource use):

- the Cree Village Ecolodge where construction caused some productive discussion in the community about traditional sustainable technology versus linking to available “normal” utilities – balancing what they wanted visitors to experience and learn about against the lesser cost of linking to “the grid” – a compromise was reached, but Rick indicates that there might still be changes.

- Wa-sh-ow James Bay Wilderness lodge, a new development in a more remote area, will require an operating hotel to address all utility needs, raising the question of how can a tourism venture cope with the huge cost of not only creating the infrastructure needed for operations, but using the latest sustainable technology.

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Week 3:

- Megan shared with us her experience consulting in Honduras, where a large scale resort development is planned for the town of Tula. Megan's point is that, if larger scale developments are done carefully, they might benefit communities and protected areas beyond the possibilities of strict ecotourism - and there can be links between traditional tourism markets and pure ecotourism products. Furthermore, larger scale tourism allows destination to make the necessary infrastructure investment (for sustainable tourism). In this case, a US\$ 40 million loan is being considered for infrastructure.

- I emphasized that since governments and banks use the "internal rate of return" calculation to verify the feasibility of infrastructure loans, strict ecotourism often has no critical volume of tax and revenue benefits to meet the benchmarks to make investment feasible. Therefore, well-planned and controlled larger scale tourism often is beneficial. For tourism sustainability, the planning/design/siting/construction stage is absolutely critical since it's at this point that most impacts are determined - and can be addressed/managed. When sustainability is incorporated at the planning stage, its incremental cost tends to zero, as proved by an example in Austria (Hotel Kaiser in Tirol).

- Rick then finalized with excellent recommendations to development agencies and organizations: to develop their own internal capacity in ecotourism know-how (indeed an admirable, yet rarely followed, management attitude. Michael Fox's point in the "Marketing" stream about NGOs often not looking for professionalism also applies here), and to always include infrastructure needs in every ecotourism/sustainable tourism project. In fact, it's quite common for agencies to develop ecotourism facilities ignoring his advice - this results in leaving infrastructure investment (key to sustainability) to local governments with no cash, ergo higher risks of failure.

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Private sector/Public sector collaboration

Moderator: Steve Noakes

Week 1:

The Private sector/Public sector collaboration session for the on-line Forum aims to focus on

1. Policy development for protected areas
2. Regional planning
3. Market research and development

Where tourism is still at an early stage of development, government generally plays a more active and leading role in its development and promotion. As it grows as an economic force and its commercial value also increases, the private sector become very interested in assessing commercial risk and investment/operations opportunities to create profits.

Apart from considering examples from different regions of the world, this on-line Forum gives us the opportunity to explore issues such as:

1. Why are public/private sector partnerships for tourism desirable and necessary?
2. What does each segment want to achieve from the partnership?
3. In what different ways can partnerships evolve in more controlled & centralized economies rather than more free market economies?
4. How do destinations achieve the right balance for their circumstances from public and private sector partnerships?
5. What conditions must exist before destinations can develop effective public and private sector partnerships?

A WTO Business Council report in 2000 revealed that experience in private-public sector cooperation around the world was rather limited except in the specific area of marketing and promotion, as well as some areas of product development and education training.

In countries which are transforming from more central economic control (e.g. old communist states) to more open economies, there is a trend where stakeholders are recognizing that public-sector led marketing organizations are often less entrepreneurial and less effective in very competitive international marketplaces than one managed or led by industry itself – or as a collaboration between government and industry.

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Week 2:

Oliver Hillel commented on the importance of well balanced PPPs (public-private-partnerships) and organizational culture. “Newer agencies led by people with at least some private sector experience make better partners than large, bureaucratically led agencies.”

Mike Robbins gave three well illustrated examples of partnerships between the government and First Nation communities in Canada: The Quu'as West Coast Trail Society & Haida Gwaii, Queen Charlotte Islands (partnerships between First Nations and the government); Clayoquot Sound World Biosphere Reserve (partnership between First Nations and government agencies, NGOs and non-native communities). He then listed the recurring qualities of successful partnerships as observed in the Canadian examples.

Duffy and Hillel posed several financial questions to which Robbins responded that he was not aware of any comprehensive cost benefit analyses for the Canadian PPP examples. However he did note that a lot of government money goes into developing these relationships – but there is a cost to go through the necessary steps to create awareness, educate, train and then develop economic opportunities in depressed communities like these. Employment positions are the next step. Entrepreneurial business development then follows. Although it takes time and dollars to go through this process, the benefits at the end are substantial. Robbins proceeded to list off the recurring benefits.

As noted by Hillel, a critical factor in the success of Canada's partnerships is a government that actually reaches out to traditional and indigenous communities.

Steve Noakes commented on PPPs in the Mekong sub-region: Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos PDR. Despite all three being at different stages of establishing PPPs, they are committed to the future establishment of some form of network cooperation among their respective national tourism marketing & promotions boards.

Hillel commented that one of the critical indicators of successful PPPs is how much public investment leveraged private sector investment, and on a larger view, revenue. The important point in tourism PPPs in developing/transition economies is how much business/jobs are generated, and whether part of the revenue is set aside for public resource management (conservation, eco-efficiency, environmental management). New, creative mechanisms and models will need to be established for PPPs to adapt to those different circumstances of developing countries –what worked in Europe and the US mustn't be forced upon the developing countries.

Megan Epler Wood noted that she finds that in ecotourism in general we are not seeing effective business alliances - to deal with even the most desired business outcome - better marketing. She would like to foster local or regional business alliances for ecotourism - that have Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reporting and marketing components, which could also foster technical support for community alliances.

Hillel commented that LOANS!!! are needed to create such business partnerships. If banks could agree to create credit lines based on a combination of criteria INCLUDING sustainability (apart from the obvious, solvency, feasibility, assets and the like), and if these lines could be tied in pipelines specifically designed for those regional "sustainable tourism" platforms. There are financial institutions examining this and some trade associations could assist.

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Week 3:

Key points that emerged from participants:

-Imperative that all parties involved be extremely clear on the goals of the project and each participant's role which help alleviate unrealistic expectations.

-A comprehensive nine point outline of a suitable process was presented and was worth further consideration.

-The need for the basic, risk/reward assessment and hard-slog realities of starting and operating any business - especially if it's a tourism business that wants/needs to deliver a quality product and get into international or even local domestic market distribution chains.

-Depending on the location, there are a variety of cultural perceptions and procedures that also need to be considered in developing and implementing the best model for a given situation.

-Megan shared her experiences in Honduras where officials have resisted allocating funds for a certification program given the high level of small/micro businesses, the perceived cost to take part in certification processes, no cost savings, no market for it, and no entity in Honduras that could afford to manage the project.

The message comes through clearly that the clarity of design of a project that is in harmony with local needs and objectives is so important

* Jamie Sweeting saw major opportunities for greater collaboration between the private sector and government agencies, national parks managers etc. and the need for NGOs to play more of a role in facilitating these kinds of alliances and developing mutually beneficial initiatives.

* He noted that NGO and funding agencies can help foster a more progressive relationship by working with government to create a more positive mechanism for achieving their desired results (most often more tourists, jobs, foreign investment, GDP earnings etc.) where companies are provided incentives (tax breaks, longer concessions etc.) for achieving good practices (these can include many different targets -- environmental, social and economic).

* He felt the private sector needed to recognize that the expectations of society are changing and that they need to manage their investment risks more effectively -- and these risks include an erosion of their product quality, health and safety. Integral to these issues are environmental and social issues in the destinations these companies are operating in. They need to work with government agencies to more effectively, and jointly, minimize these risks (via land use planning, adequate infrastructure - sewage treatment, clean water provision etc.)

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Finance for SMEs

Moderator: Jeanine Corvetto

Week 1:

Rod Bilz, FRi Ecological Services, discussed his difficulty finding financing for his product in Guyana despite the fact that there is \$5 million available to finance tourism projects. No funds have been spent because no company met the eligibility requirements. He also discussed the challenges presented by possible mergers since it would reduce the quality of his product. He has asked if anyone else had thoughts on the role of small companies in international tourism projects.

Oliver Hillel responded to Rod's comments by saying that banks and development agencies tend to want to lend to those who do not need it. SMEs unfortunately demonstrate that their risks of default are greater than for larger corporations. He identified Rainforest Adventures in Peru as an example of a company that was able to mitigate externalities of working in developing countries by associating itself with NGOs to cultivate donors for grants. He was wondering if Rod considered turning the Guyana project into a project eligible for grant funding.

Ron from Planeta discussed the high failure rate of internationally funded tourism projects particularly in the realm of sustainable travel and ecotourism. He discussed the types of things financial institutions could do to be more effective and make information more available and the lending process more accessible and transparent. Planeta.com has launched the Sustainable Tourism Bank Watch (STBW) to bring together multiple stakeholders -- including donors, communities, operators and media -- to review current financing of sustainable travel and ecotourism offered by International Financial Institutions (IFIs).

Institutions financing ecotourism, sustainable travel and responsible tourism are highlighted on Planeta's Financing Sustainable Tourism index

http://www.planeta.com/ecotravel/tour/ecotourism_fspot.html

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Week 2:

Rod responded to Oliver's point about innovation in the funding approaches. The problem for a small company considering (Build Operate and Transfer) BOT agreements is that often it is not in the business of operating a tourism facility and he would have to shift the focus of his business and a wholesale change in staff to operate a tourism facility to regain his investment. He noted that having trained individuals may present a possibility of looking at BOT agreements.

Megan joined in saying that she was concerned that some NGOs were mixing donations and investments and not creating clear legal divisions between these two types of operations. Also they did not clearly delineate between the goals and objectives of the NGO overseeing the ecotourism project and the goals and objectives of the tourism program as a business. This experience also raised so many other questions about how an NGO can manage a tourism business, and if it is really possible to write a business plan that does not create clear, legal boundaries between the business of ecotourism and the NGOs needs for operational funds.

From her perspective it is really not advisable to use an NGO structure to manage ecotourism. From the finance perspective, it was problematic since the NGO was seeking investors to underwrite their capital costs, but in this plan they were not offering a rate of return on investment. The NGO appeared to be mixing donations with investments and not taking into account investment returns that would be required by investors.

Rod said that he had originally invited the representative from CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) to monitor this forum to give him a better understanding of the challenges tourism developers and operators face in developing economies. He encouraged others to invite those agencies you have dealt with in the past and may deal with in the future to have a look at these proceedings as well.

Emilio Kifuri with Canyon Travel <http://www.canyontravel.com> discussed his partnerships with several communities and his success in building several lodges in the Sierra Madre (Copper Canyon). His 30+ years of experience and existing business allowed him to finance the construction and renovation of the lodges. Upfront costs were reduced through agreements to use

the land rather than purchase. He discussed the high operating costs of these lodges due to their location and the community employment agreements. Also it is difficult for him to distinguish his product from operators with less expensive (lower quality) trips. He is interested in working with others in promoting a more "eco" vision of travel in Mexico.

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Communities and SMEs

Moderator: Nicole Haeusler

Week 1:

An important question was asked right at the beginning of the workshop: “Do most of the communities prefer to own their own business, have a joint venture with an outside business or would rather to just have a job, or have people buy their crafts or crops?”

And the comments were the following ones:

- Depends on the community – a model project does not exist as the situation is different in each community, even within the same country or region.
- The wants of the community will change over time – Community-based Tourism (CBT) is not a static situation but rather a “supple” process in which communities change their needs and requests.
- Not all members can directly benefit from CBT, but normally lots of possibilities regarding indirect benefits for community members or neighboring communities exist.

There was a strong tendency by the participants to support Joint Ventures between Communities and Private Sectors “to make changes feasible in terms of market realities” as against NGOs and other agencies who may raise inappropriate expectations but may distort the real focus as they often fail to include or involve market players in the early stages.

Jan Wigsten gave good examples of the successful work of his company in Mongolia. One of the results was the setting up of an own tour company by an indigenous partner who is now a subcontractor of Nomadic Journeys Ltd.

If private business is interested in cooperating with a community, both often need donor grant support – particularly “if the business will be developed in areas where poverty is high, infrastructure is poor and ethnic differences tend to be sensitive” – as the investment of time, patience and manpower will be much higher for the private company. For that reason it is important to develop practical solutions that allow donors to develop useful technical assistance programs directly to business development in poor regions.

While implementing projects for communities or SMEs, the following aspects were identified as the most critical ones:

- To translate service economy concepts like the difference between capital and Income
- Risk management

- Investment (no profit, if you don't invest)
- Markets
- Role of the leaders
- Lack of coordination and communication between the different stakeholders within the community but as well outside the community (Media, independent travelers, agencies)

Before implementing a tourism business project into a community, the consultants, NGOs and or donor agencies have to understand much better the social and political structure or in other words the livelihood strategy of the community. “Even within the same countries, the livelihood strategies or parts of a community, differs greatly... But the level of success (community benefits) depends on leadership and livelihood approaches of the community as well as the stakeholder scenario. And certainly, it will be a different “can of worms” in each place.” And quite often consultants do not have this kind of understanding while helping to plan and implement a CBT Project. “Ecotourism consultants do not develop a strong understanding of the local needs and aspirations.”

It has been as well recommended to develop on-the-job training programs as (ethnic) communities are not so much used to our western school system (sit down and listen). They prefer the practical learning in the field by doing “things” - and the same is recommended for tourism training.

Key points of this discussion:

- Recommendation: Joint Ventures between Communities and Private Business
- Private sector, consultants and donor agencies have to understand the livelihood strategy of the community
- THE Model-project does not exist
- A well-functioning internal and external Communication is as well an important aspect of a successful CBT-Story

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Week 2:

Mike Robbins, a tourism consultant from Toronto, gave us an impressive best practice example of a CBT-Project in Canada's newest Territory, Nunavut, first developed some 24 years ago and reused in many other remote and semi-remote First Nation communities in various provinces.

He mentioned an important aspect: “At the time most of the Inuit in the community did not differentiate between actual tourists and federal or territorial government officials (non-Inuit)”. Mike and his colleagues developed a CBT-Plan with strong community support and involvement, and a process that could be replicated in other Inuit communities.

The FOCUS of the plan: The community could control tourism through tour operators and organized groups rather than independent visitors.

He recommended CBT should adopt the following PRINCIPLES:

- The community makes decisions to pursue tourism (or no) based on knowledge of the

pros and cons of tourism

- Extensive community involvement and consultation is completed
- The community develops a strategy (with outside expertise and assistance), which defines how much control the community should have, and the events, activities and places that can and can not be shared with tourists
- The community makes strategic investments to be a catalyst for private sector investment
- The community continues to monitor and evaluate initiatives and development

By now there is a great diversity of Inuit owned and operated tourism products within 25 Inuit communities (accommodation, guides, boat trips).

BENEFITS of CBT in Nunavut:

- Strong interest in Inuit culture from visitors creates pride for local people in their culture and home; visitors begin to understand the Inuit culture
- Provides steady seasonal employment in communities
- Indirect economic benefit for local people
- Stimulates preservation of artifacts, customs and traditional knowledge; encourages realization of the value and sustainable use of cultural assets like archaeological sites
- Education through tourism training helps to encourage an interest in knowledge and learning

KEYS to future growth:

- To enhance training opportunities
- Better community and political awareness of the benefits of tourism
- Access to capital
- To develop more export ready products and experiences
- Involvement in all stages of the visitor booking and travel process

Furthermore Mike recommended developing an Aboriginal certification program, certifying products as authentic and as reaching certain minimum service standards.

Kurt Kutay gave another Best Practice Example with Maasai in Kenya and Tanzania. He identified the following success factors:

1. Strong and educated native leader with experiences in tourism
2. Project worked through its own decision making board (MERC)
3. Wholesalers (be it a dedicated inbound operator, local NGOs or indigenous entrepreneurs) are involved early on.

Megan Epler Wood emphasized QUALITY (“The market for CBT is not necessarily backpackers”). CBT has to meet quality standards - and effective business alliances between private sector and communities is the key to reach this goal, which can provide professional marketing strategies. Therefore donors should focus on funding these alliances in order to move projects forwards (“...our industry is still emerging fro many reasons having to do with the need to make it ecologically and socially very responsible – and for this reason marketing and business networks have not taken off to date”).

Kurt Kutay added that “more meaningful authentic cultural tourism is in high demand in the

ecotourism segment” and that there is a real interest and opportunity in up-market ecotourism, especially if it is tied to conservation and sustainable development.

Tropic-Journeys in Nature, has worked with a wide variety of CBT Projects in the Amazon and Ecuador, offering technical assistance and marketing support and gave as well an impressive overview of their initiatives including the creation of business alliances with other responsible private companies. In the case of the Huaorani, Amazon Headwaters, the project has helped to generate exposure and international attention on a macro-level to the Huaorani and their struggles, particularly oil exploitation. (“For remote indigenous communities ... international attention resulting from concerned tourists, international press etc. is one of the most effective weapons in counteracting the environmental and cultural danger ...encouraged by Outsiders working in the Huaorani Territory”).

Oliver Hillel came back to the discussion regarding the different roles, duties and mentalities of NGOs (first priorities: looking for more projects, fundraising, deadlines of reports), Tourism Consultants (time limits) and Tour Operators (first priority: business).

He suggested that an independent agency should manage the remains and keep the lessons learned. “Also, by setting up a project, you can hire short-term professionals in each slot (instead of the same generalists NGOs would tend to use”).

Megan Epler Wood gave an example of the business plan of an NGO, which did not clearly delineate between the goals and objectives of the NGO overseeing the ecotourism project and the goals and objectives of the tourism program as a business. For her “it is really not advisable to use an NGO structure to manage ecotourism”.

Finally Aivar Ruukel from Estonia confirmed that you could find so many different scenarios and levels of local involvement in his country. Joint ventures with foreign partners are so far not very common. He believes that the success of CBT depends on the “best members” of community. For him the involvement of ALL members in a CBT-Project is even dangerous as it could cause a monoculture of tourism within the community, which could destroy the good balance with other livelihoods.

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Week 3:

Oliver Hillel stressed again on the fact that ecotourism is an interdisciplinary field which brings together many different sets of professionals which can easily cause confusion (for example if a biologist should develop a business plan and a business administrator a conservation strategy).

Coming back to the role of the consultants in such a process, Mary Finn believes that consultants should be simply and only facilitators in the community-based tourism planning process. All the final decisions have to be taken by the community only.

From her experience it is important that the consultants spend SEVERAL WEEKS in a community and should conduct consultation techniques like community, group and individual meetings. Unfortunately most of the development agencies are not interested to finance this type of investment.

Rick MacLeod Farley, a consultant who works with Aboriginal communities, pointed out again that ecotourism represents for indigenous communities an opportunity that can bring many economic, environmental, cultural, social and political benefits. The key to achieve these benefits is active involvement in and genuine control over these ecotourism initiatives within their traditional territory. Furthermore they must have the opportunity to be involved in the actual ownership of ecotourism enterprises and to have their representatives play an active, leadership role at all levels to plan and develop ecotourism.

Additionally Rick indicated that a successful indigenous ecotourism sector will greatly strengthen ecotourism as a global industry and mentioned as a best practice example the Cree Village Ecolodge (www.creevillage.com), the National Tourism Award Winner by the Tourism Industry Association of Canada in 2004. They reached this level of success by being patient, purposeful and persistent. The planning of the Ecolodge took place over an extended period of time (five years).

As a weak point he has identified that the Canadian development agencies still have not changed their approach to Aboriginal ecotourism. There is still no increased willingness to involve Aboriginal leadership in setting policy or developing programs for the development agencies. Furthermore these agencies still not realize that the implementation of a community-based ecotourism project takes more time in order to reach a quality, which can compete at the international level.

After that a lively discussion started about the useful role of INTERNET MARKETING. Mary Finn has involved volunteers and backpackers helping to create WebPages for its projects but gave a strong warning that these young volunteers have to participate in an open, community-wide discussion in order to understand the community traditions, social issues and aims of the project.

But the communities themselves have been identified as a weak actor regarding Internet marketing. Most of them do not see the need or are not able ñ due to technical or financial problems - to answer the mails and do not update the sites at all. Language is another problem, as most of these WebPages are in English or Spanish only but should be offered at least in two or even more languages.

Therefore Ron Mader gave the strong recommendation that development agencies and donors should not fund website creation, but WEBSITE PARTICIPATION. Grants should include adequate communication training, which includes web training. The first step should be the teaching of obtaining and maintaining an email account. The secondary step should be the website development.

Toot Oostveen/SNV came back to the question Megan has asked about ST-EP, launched by WTO. SNV cooperates in this regard with WTO and she gave a brief summary about the actual situation (see her response on Friday, 18 November 2005). In 2005 about 40 SNV tourism advisors work worldwide. Toot kindly offered to send an information leaflet about SNV clients and approaches in tourism to interested persons (email: tootveen@snvworld.org).

At the end of the discussion Rick MacLeod Farley gave the top ten guidelines for accessing grants and other funding for CBET-Projects:

1. Inventory your potential funders
2. Short-list your target funders
3. Seek first to understand
4. Develop supporters and allies (build positive relationships with people in the agency and identify allies for your project)
5. Seek second to understand (study in details the target funders objectives and criteria)
6. Speak their language (give them every reason to say yes to your proposal)
7. Be politely persistent
8. Strategically support your funding applications
9. Consider whether or not you should hire a guide (professional consultant)
10. Expect success, expect delays (be patient, be persistent)

Finally he gave recommendations for development agencies:

- ? Build your own internal ecotourism CAPACITY- Ensure that your field staff and decision-makers understand the complexities of ecotourism - Assess your capacity to support ecotourism
- ? Use Ecotourism Industry NORMS - Work with ecotourism industry data
- ? Staff EFFECTIVENESS ñ implement effective staff monitoring mechanisms including surveys ñ Have a senior level ecotourism expert available
- ? APPROPRIATE Ecotourism PROCESS ñ Successful community ecotourism development requires additional time and steps in order to be successful ñ Need to expand the usual project development focus on Feasibility study then Business Plan to include additional items including Community Planning, Concept Development, Community Training, Infrastructure Planning and Operational Start-up Support.

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Marketing and Market Development

Moderator: Richard Edwards

Week 1:

This week there was discussion of the role of certification in the marketing of tourism. Some participants support the idea that certification could be a motor for further spreading the word about responsible travel choices and convincing travelers to choose sustainably/responsibly. Several participants disagree about the pertinence and short-term potential of certification at this point in time, except possibly in B-to-B marketing.

We've also looked a bit at how to subsidize new projects that promote the needs and interests of local people so that their ecotourism products can reach a certain level of maturity and compete in the marketplace, while maintaining the integrity of local ecosystems and cultures.

Others, specifically those working directly in assisting with small, rural SMEs in developing countries are asking the forum for some practical answers on how to help those SMEs reach the market, present their products, and bring buyers (including wholesalers and direct consumers) and sellers together. Jamie said:

jsweeting wrote: My principle interest here is to see how we can use markets (both direct to the consumer and within the supply chain) to increase competitiveness and profitability of tourism SMEs working in high biodiversity areas. The more successful SMEs are the more people they can employ and the greater likelihood for getting local communities to support conservation -- because they see more economic benefit from protection than destructive utilization.

How do we more effectively help grow these kinds of businesses? How do we encourage European and North American outbound eco/adventure (and for that matter Mass Tourism) operators to be more proactive in seeking out and supporting such SMEs and promoting those that are most committed to making a difference in the lives of local people and conservation?

We have yet to really present many solutions here that would allow the bridging of this gap. The one consensus that we seem to be moving toward is that there is a need for leadership from an institution, whether it is a business alliance or an NGO that will: help to educate consumer travelers in order to reach those who will purchase ecotourism products if given the proper information to make distinctions; have the capacity and means to educate wholesalers and other enterprises involved in reselling ecotourism products on the short and long term profitability of “going sustainable”; reach out to local communities in a meaningful and practical way to provide them the assistance they need to access potential markets.

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Week 2:

We began our week with Peter straightening those of us out who think that certification is not an attractive value proposition for clients/travelers. He has had a good experience with the Swedish government and non-profit sectors assisting in making the Nature's Best label a valuable marketing tool.

Among those who question the value of certification, there seems to be agreement on the point that if a certification program is industry driven, as opposed to run by an NGO, then it has a better possibility for success. Nonetheless, government needs to play a role in ecotourism industry development, because the long start-up times can be debilitating for small businesses.

An over-arching theme has been the need for an “alliance” of businesses that provide for the motor for increasing market reach for the ecotourism industry. This alliance might also work in the areas of product development and support for start-ups.

Several were in favor of using the equity the term ecotourism has built, continuing to define it in our own minds and the minds of consumers, and not dilute the term or abandon it in favor of some other term. Others aren't so sure that ecotourism is even a market.

There were several posts from a variety of countries questioning the viability and actual effectiveness of Internet marketing. There are those who believe that Internet marketing is more of a challenge than necessary for smaller businesses and it would be more effective to distribute their time among other channels, with the web being only one. We've also seen quite a bit of

evidence from other contributors that it's not out of reach for SMEs to successfully focus their marketing endeavors on the Internet. My experience over the last 5 years with businesses of smaller and medium size is that we can compete with anybody, small or large, with considerable but feasible effort. That said, so far we are all in agreement that an approach that is at least somewhat multi-pronged is only rational.

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Week 3:

The week began with Richard giving his opinion on two posts from the previous week on the high value of promoting small projects through an aggressive Search Engine Marketing campaign. There continues to be two directions in the thoughts posted on this subject. One is that the web is too competitive for it to make sense for a small project or company to devote too much time to promoting itself primarily through the web. The other is that the web can level the playing field and provide an opportunity for those with fewer resources to find their way to potential consumers in a relatively cost-effective way.

George discussed the strategy of targeting upscale consumers, beginning with the planning stages of a project, which has resulted in both higher gross sales and higher profits. He says, "It is a lot easier to start with a more expensive rate and then offer discounts when you need to attract more business than it is to try and increase your rates when your margins start to erode."

There was a discussion with participation from George, Oliver and Richard concerning optimal percentages to be paid through a variety of marketing channels. There was agreement that percentages can be high (25% or more) if the channel is providing a constant and substantial flow of business to a particular enterprise.

Jamie brought up the potential for SMEs to tap in to mass market supply chains, such as cruise ships. Citing the fact that even if the traveler is not participating in a tour that would necessarily be sanctioned as ecotourism, they may still be a candidate for contributing to an SME that is running sustainable. Who knows? The exposure to a more sustainable way of traveling may alter the traveler's choices for future travel.

The last two posts, as well as the conversation overall during the entire three weeks, highlighted two subjects that are closely related. First, ecotourism is a business, and in order to contribute to sustainability efforts ecotourism projects need to be run like a business, since the only they can make a contribution is if they are IN business. Consequently, marketing must be given high priority in order to succeed and survive. Though the motivation behind starting the SME or project may be altruistic, and the experience provided to travelers first-rate, if the marketing isn't aggressive and effective, they will not come and the enterprise will not survive.

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Interpretive Program Development

Moderator: Jeremy Garrett

Week 1-2:

George Duffy felt that geo-caching holds much potential as an interpretive tool and destination magnet, with many hikers using a GPS unit for aid in orientation. He maintained that a good guide is one of the most crowd-pleasing features of any travel experience, but that guides are generally poorly paid and underappreciated until after the fact. He posed that maybe we need to start nature guide critics like restaurant critics or movie critics to create demand for good guides.

Jeremy Garrett questioned whether consumers or outbound tour operators will pay more for guiding services, and wondered who offers the best guide training programs.

Theresa Southam spoke of guides who are servicing wealthy individuals by building personalized experiences for them, their families and their companies. This type of service is well-paid and engaging since it is different every time. The North American Association for Environmental Education provides good guide training.

George Duffy confirmed that good guides can simply demand and get more money from clients, or shop their services around. He felt it was reasonable to expect that people will pay more for great guides, citing expensive tours hosted by some perceived expert (e.g. local celebrity food critic who has gotten into guiding international tours). If an inbound operator positions itself as having the best guides, and delivers the goods, they could command more money from their outbound colleagues who buy their services, and vice versa – if you have a reputation for poor guides, you are not going to go too far. The key is to advise clients why it costs more and why it's worth more.

Verena Gerber employs an indigenous bilingual naturalist guide with a bachelor's degree in ornithology who is very knowledgeable about local natural history and conducts their 12 ecological tours to the Special Biosphere Reserve of Celestun. Her experience however is that their guests are not willing to pay more for his expertise, so she wondered how to market and portray to the guests a good guide so that they are willing to pay more? Their other challenge is to present guests with information that they find interesting and can relate to; local knowledge of medical uses and anecdotes has been very useful.

Rod Bilz suggested that clients need to take trip reminders. Photos are a good example but other creative options might be to record on a CD the sounds of a trip with a parabolic microphone, along with a checklist of the sounds contained on the CD. Another interesting product might be a personalized map developed with a GPS unit to track a person's adventures including hikes, treks, kayaking or other transport, and incorporating points of interest such as wildlife sightings, references for photos taken, etc. These are great ways of documenting a trip and are great marketing tools when clients show them to friends and perspective new clients.

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Week 3:

Mary Finn commented that an Ecuadorian community ecotourism project was convinced that guides must memorize long lists of scientific and English names for local flora and fauna, rather than valuing their own indigenous knowledge, including medicinal uses of plants, local legends and stories, and even local names for natural things. She wondered if this was because guide training is usually conducted by biologists (who may tend towards imparting their own knowledge and love of nomenclature?).

Mary postulated that the relative importance of biological nomenclature vs. “stories” depends on the type of visitor ñ for example, hard-core birders may insist upon a guide who knows all the names of the birds, whereas other visitors are much more interested in hearing compelling stories and anecdotes about the people as well as the nature of a place.

Jeremy Garrett echoed Mary’s comments, relating a recent conversation where hard-core birders said it was vital for bird watching guides to know all the names of the bird species ñ common, regional and scientific ñ and also their birdcalls. Whereas, a “general” ecotourism guide decided not to delve into specifics, and simply sticks with one species through the course of the trip, tying it directly back to people in ways they'd never considered.

Jeremy proposed that the level of interpretation depends on the audience. If a guide notices that only one or two people out of 16 are actually listening to him/her, then they should moderate their "high-brow" discussions and only point such things out to the interested parties and not subject to the whole group to it. Jeremy further advised that all guides conduct some form of review, at least annually, and ask people what they liked/didn't like about the trip and ways for improvement.

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Triple Bottom Line Business Structures and Strategies

Moderator: Toby Bloom

Week 1:

- Certification- the process of certification has helped several operators to better define their product, lower operating costs, develop better business management, and reduce their impacts on the environment. Several participants also agreed that Certification systems seem to provide more advantages for business to business contacts. However, participants agreed that it is the process itself and not the actual seal of accreditation that is responsible for the change. Rod Bilz noted that certification itself can be helpful, but only when you target a niche market, and that a lot of public education is required by the certification organizations and the tourism industry to help foster this client base. This is especially true in North America where this concept is relatively unknown to the masses. Other drawbacks of certification cited by participants were a lack of uniformity (too many types of certification) and high cost associated with monitoring to maintain the certification body – in terms of its own economic feasibility. It was also noted that there are no valid market research studies that indicate that certification can be directly linked to building business market access and that donors seeking to support certification need to consider it as a tool for quality control but not for introducing SME products, especially in developing countries where small business is dependent on support for

viable market access approaches, into the marketplace.

- BOT Transfers- We briefly touched on this topic. Participants agreed that this model is compelling, but there has been very little research done on the success of these projects, whether individually or compared with other models. None of the participants cited examples of projects with BOT transfers that had completed the whole buy-operate-transfer process.
- CSR- CSR reporting can help systematize and monitor corporate performance while moving through improvements in management, but the tourism industry has not “joined the fold” with respect to these reporting systems. While UNEP and CI worked substantially to create CSR reporting guidelines via the Responsible Tour Operator's Initiative partnering with CERES, <http://www.toinitiative.org/reporting/documents/TourOperatorsSupplementNovember2002.pdf> to date these guidelines have not been used for any known tourism industry reporting project according to CERES representatives.

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Week 2:

This week, the conversation started off focusing on the benefits and challenges of Resorts developing in generating jobs and contributing to resource management. Toot Oostveen shared with us an example cited at a WTO conference, where approximately 90% of labor and goods at a resort in Nicaragua were procured locally. Those interested in further research should check out Voyages, an Australian resort chain, or could contact Klaus Lengefeld at GTZ in Germany, Klaus.Lengefeld@gtz.de.

An excellent example of how to create a conservation-based economy on a large scale can be found with Tides Canada, along with several other NGOs, who work to protect The Great Bear Rainforest in British Columbia, home to some of Canada's First Nations. A few years ago, a framework agreement between first nations, the federal and provincial governments, and environmental organizations was achieved. This agreement represents one of North America's largest conservation undertakings and includes full protection of over 30% of the land. It also includes land use agreements between first nations and the government.

The conversation returned once again to certification, with my announcement of the publishing of " Beyond The Beach: Quick Reference Guide for Competing in the Sustainable Tourism Market." The PDF version and background info will be available to the public at www.chemonics.com in the next few weeks, and the content will be posted on the Triple Standards Working Group website, www.caudillweb.com/triplestandards. There was also concern that the forum was dismissing the benefits of certification, just because there is a lack good research to quantify the benefits of ecotourism certification. He felt that the approach should be to approach the tourism research community to push for good research so we can develop research-based programs. Certification programs that his organization has looked at recently in their work for Native tourism clients include: www.toiio.com, www.rocprogram.com, www.neap.com.au , and www.niaaa.com/label.html.

George Duffy presented the perspective of a company that could potentially seek certification.

George believed more in the value of labeling with the purpose to create brand recognition. He felt that certification will not go anywhere until there is a demonstrable, credible, long term marketing plan, and that the industry (ecotourism) needs a brand identity to clearly separate it from adventure travel, where at the moment it is now more or less lumped in with.

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Week 3:

The week started off with discussion of NEAP, Australia's Ecotourism certification program. Ron was unaware of any recent improvements as to the marketability of the program. Mike Robbins responded with some excerpts from research on the tourism Queensland website,
<http://www.tq.com.au/industry/sustainable-tourism/research.cfm>

Further updates as to improvements in the NEAP program since 2000 are also available at
http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/corp_site/key_issues/tourism/certification.html

Megan reminded us that extensive research has been done on the question of certification and its validity in the marketplace and as a quality control mechanism. Such information is readily available on the websites of TIES and Rainforest Alliance.

Mike Robbins referred to one such TIES article that was published in April of 2005 which seems to suggest that certification can and does work if designed and marketed properly. He also pointed out that there are many other equally as important benefits:

- Provide credibility for small remote operators with the international travel trade
- Ensure that consumer expectations are met
- Protecting cultural integrity
- A valuable approach to joint/partnership marketing helping to create a louder voice in the marketplace
- A tool to facilitate continuous improvement

Toby picked up on an earlier point made by George Duffy, where he stated that "...ecotourism is primarily for the purposes of having a nature tour experience, not a community experience, not an urban experience, not a rural experience, yet those themes seem to keep encroaching on ecotourism and that somehow ecotourism can be or should be tweaked to include a broader meaning. I think it should be narrow and specific. "

She agreed that the definition of ecotourism should be narrow and specific, but argued that there are such definitions where the above experiences do indeed have a place. She also argued that the definition of "fair" in regard to ecotourism doesn't mean that everyone gets what they want 100% of the time, but that those affected

by ecotourism have a chance to voice their opinions and be heard when decisions are being made. Ron agreed, and asked, with that definition in mind, what we should expect of or suggest to development agencies and donors working in this field in order to make this a reality.

Megan commented on the challenges of developing sustainable tourism in Honduras, specifically on the fact that there are so many important issues to confront, and that our ability to build competitiveness has to take priority in her view in the private sector. It is important to make sure our priorities as a field are in the right order when offering assistance in DEVELOPING countries where there is really a different set of needs and priorities than in countries where tax dollars and government programs are covering a great deal of expense for developing ambitious programs that could not be considered in a place like Honduras.

Mike Robbins submitted the following (summarized) recommendations:

1. We need to work to minimize the mis-use and abuse of the term "ecotourism" through education and by example.
2. We should work to showcase best practice models, as they stimulate creative thinking and give us all new insights into how we can be innovative in the field.
3. We need to continue to educate and be proponents of ecotourism as a tool for environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and economic generator in rural communities
4. Don't give up on certification
5. We should enable communities to make their own decision as to whether or not they want to participate in ecotourism, and as consultants we should help communities that do wish to participate.

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Developing Infrastructure for Sustainable Tourism

Private sector/Public sector collaboration

Finance for SMEs

Communities and SMEs

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Developing Infrastructure for Sustainable Tourism

Oliver Hillel

- Get more agencies to assist in developing proposals. For infrastructure, one of the challenges is that it's costly and quite technically difficult to produce the Terms of Reference (TORs) for a project. Before you can approach a credit agency or donor, you need to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars just to carefully produce the requirements for an airport, water system or a road. Few agencies are willing to fund this first stage - one exception is **JBIC's** Special Assistance for Project Formation. Of course, consulting companies are very glad to come up with template, back-of-the-envelope proposals for free (prospecting their next bid), but this is simply not enough, and it's not done from the point of view of the destination's priorities.

- Engender creative ways to raise local funds to provoke the interest of donors/lenders. Here, we've tried suggesting to the private sector to create a "challenge fund", say of US\$10,000, specifically to demand matching funds from local politicians and Municipal Governments, which in turn can serve as initial collateral for donors. This fund is intended to stir political willingness and momentum as much as funds.

Rick MacLeod Farley

Build Your Capacity

Much of the development literature focuses on building community capacity.

One of the most important and most neglected things a Development Agency can do is to build their own internal ecotourism capacity - hire staff with specific ecotourism development expertise, train your staff in ecotourism development, and make sure your front-line staff have and use a full set of ecotourism development tools in-house or on-hand: including expertise with community ecotourism planning, community training, project management, infrastructure for projects (green building, green power,) and regions, and ecotourism marketing.

Ensure that your field staff and decision-makers understand and effectively work with the complexities of ecotourism and treat it as a unique and worthwhile industry.

A good starting point for development agencies is to assess your capacity to support ecotourism – measure your expertise, evaluate your success and identify your ecotourism development strengths and weaknesses.

Widely disseminated research into successful projects and the role that development agencies and their staff played in their success would be most helpful.

Use Ecotourism Industry Norms

Every development agency involved in assessing ecotourism projects should work with ecotourism industry data to compare projects appropriately.

A great ecotourism lodging 'norms' document is called the "The Business of Ecolodges: A Survey of Ecolodge Economics and Finance" - Sanders and Halpenny, The International Ecotourism Society, 2001.

Infrastructure Costs

When comparing ecotourism projects, infrastructure aspects should be looked at as a key component of the overall project and some effort made to benchmark related costs off of projects which have successfully addressed similar infrastructure challenges elsewhere. Benefits of the infrastructure specific investment should be evaluated in terms of both direct and indirect aspects.

Staff Effectiveness

Development agencies should implement effective staff monitoring mechanisms including surveys with current and past ecotourism project applicants (successful and otherwise!) and community leadership as a form of quality and satisfaction assurance.

Development agencies should have a senior level ecotourism expert available who can support and monitor all field staff to ensure high caliber work and effectiveness.

Development agencies should also provide more than one access point for seeking support on ecotourism and other projects. While a single assigned main contact person is acceptable (often done by geographic region), there should always be a secondary contact available for situations where project proponents feel their project is not being evaluated effectively.

Appropriate Ecotourism Process

Ecotourism is a complex industry, and successful community ecotourism project development requires additional time and steps in order to be successful. Development Agencies need to expand the usual project development focus. Feasibility Study and Business Planning is only part of the process. Community Planning, Concept Development, Community Training, Infrastructure Planning and Operational Start-up Support are needed.

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Private sector/Public sector collaboration

Rod Bilz

This is a very rough framework that could be used to improve collaborative efforts:

1. Mandatory meeting of all participants including private sector, public sector, community participants and donor or funding agencies to clearly define the goals of the project.
2. The goals should be expressed in terms of the concept of triple bottom line accounting that includes financial, social and environmental benefits and should have reasonable and attainable timelines to meet these goals.
3. Each sector should express their expectations for success under each of these three areas and specifically how success will be measured.
4. Once the goals have been clearly identified and specifically how the success will be measured, an assessment should be made to identify common goals between the sectors involved in the project. Chances of success of any project is that there are common goals and expectations. If funding agencies are only concerned with financial success, communities are only concerned about environmental outcomes and public sectors are only concerned about social considerations, then the chances of a collaborative success are greatly diminished.
5. Evaluate the overlap of common goals between all sectors involved and make a determination if it is significant enough to proceed.
6. Once the project starts, ensure measurements towards goals are frequent, consistently done and most importantly, communicated to all partners involved.
7. Continue to collaborate actively to adjust strategies to ensure goals are met or exceeded.
8. Regardless whether the goals are met within the planned timelines or not, a follow-up assessment should be made to identify strengths and weaknesses in the plan. Again this is an area that does not happen often enough. Failures can go a long way to ensure future successes as long as there is a clear understanding why it failed and what needs to be done in the future to ensure success.
9. Communication again. Don't sit on this information or put it on a shelf to collect dust. There should be a repository of these assessments so mistakes are not repeated and successful models can be replicated.

A central repository of this information would be hugely beneficial to all parties involved. Any ideas or comments on what I've suggested?

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Finance for SMEs

Oliver Hillel

As an initial contribution to the banks willing to take this up, I'd say work should initially concentrate on:

- creating pilot pipeline credit lines (why not begin with a few million US\$ as a test?) especially adapted to sustainable tourism, to be distributed by local banks: these should be compatible with the specific needs of the industry (often more on "soft" than on "hard" components, i.e. financing working capital, marketing initiatives, operating equipment, training and pre-feasibility studies rather than only facilities and/or land), minimizing risks by providing technical assistance in business plans and commercial partnership building, requiring strict operational safety procedures (to reduce insurance rates), addressing the need for guarantees (by accepting value not only for titled land, and by examining options for bank guarantees and reinsurance), adapting pay-backs to business cycles in tourism (2-3 years to establish a brand, creating systems to adapt payments to seasonal variation). It is actually not difficult once there's a strategic decision.

- Building the capacity of local bank branch managers to understand sustainable tourism. Often, banks have programs available for this (just ask and they'll tell you that there's no need to create such a credit line because it's already there...), but the fact is local bank loan officers know about crops, home building, financing stock and export, car leases, cattle and fishing boats, but have no clue what to do about ecotourism. If a bank launches a program for SMEs in tourism, it's essential to bring in the interface with the client - the local development bank officers who process the actual credit application (and is the one to say no to potential applicants).

- Actively sending savvy scouts to look for those rare combinations of capacity/value and market growth that would make successful demo loan cases. Of course, many good candidates do not go to banks (they look for something closer like venture capital or relatives, even loan sharks). Often, the ones that show up at bank branches are the shadier dealers who know the bureaucracy...

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Communities and SMEs

Mike Robbins

CBT should adopt the following PRINCIPLES:

- The community makes decisions to pursue tourism (or no) based on knowledge of the pros and cons of tourism
- Extensive community involvement and consultation is completed
- The community develops a strategy (with outside expertise and assistance), which defines how much control the community should have, and the events, activities and places that can and can not be shared with tourists
- The community makes strategic investments to be a catalyst for private sector investment
- The community continues to monitor and evaluate initiatives and development

Ron Mader

Let me start off with my recommendation -- I would like to make a formal request to development assistance agencies and donors that they fund not website creation, but website participation. Make it incumbent on the grantee that they participate in at least two independent forums. Grants should include adequate communication training, which includes but is not limited to the Web.

Marketing and Market Development

George Duffy

There are three main guidelines for funding assistance. This is for marketing projects only.

1. The project must be new or incremental. In other words, you can't apply for money to subsidize an existing project.
2. The project must include at least 2 or more partners. Example, a lodge, a transportation company and a village museum.
3. The project must have an objective with a measurable outcome. It could be something like attend an adventure travel trade show in Vancouver and get the product placed in 5 wholesaler catalogues by 2007.

George Duffy

What does work is when everyone in the same supply chain pools money, then they together stands to gain or lose. For example: I develop a tour using five lodges, a local guiding company, a local airline, a local bus company etc. We all contribute something, we all have a vested interest in making the program a success and we all will benefit proportionately. Once the plan is formulated if there were some dollars available to help ramp up the program, so much the better.

This is where a donor organization can play a good role. Not to be the marketing body or DMO. There is a lot of danger in giving marketing money to DMOs as Megan has also alluded.

Megan Epler Wood

1. On the community development side, I think that good quality local representation is really required in order to make communities effective players in the landscape of ecotourism development. The market for community-based ecotourism is not necessarily backpackers in my view . But it will be backpackers unless there is effective, community-private sector partnerships to make these projects meet quality standards in the long term. I think developing private sector/community alliances is key. These alliances could also handle marketing. This is the solution I recommended during my work in Chiapas, and despite years of conflict in that region, I was amazed how quickly the project was embraced. Local tour operators needed community alliances to make their projects work and the communities needed the local tour operators. In this case, infrastructure in Chiapas is already in place so this was not the problem it can be. So I do believe that donors need to focus on funding community private sector alliances in order to move projects forward.

2. What we have frankly not seen to date in the ecotourism world are effective business alliances. And this is another powerful area for donor support. Some may question why donors should support business alliances, but my argument is that our industry is still emerging for many reasons having to do with the need to make it ecologically and socially very responsible - and that for this reason marketing and business networks have not taken off to date. If such alliances can be tied to developing more community projects, that could be especially effective in my view - as we need to provide incentives for business to work with communities and we need to also offer technical assistance to make certain it is done with appropriate technical expertise.

I also find that financing high quality market research - which we still lack in our field after all this time - might be best done at the regional level. As most of you know, there are few if any

good statistics on ecotourism travel at the national or destination level. I convinced my project leader in Ecuador to allow us to do such research for indigenous tourism in Ecuador. The results were excellent and I think every project should consider having such research as the basis for beginning to consider what markets they are seeking to reach. But it is not really that useful at the international level I don't think.

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George Duffy

I would reiterate that people overseeing ecotourism projects or those looking at funding them look for ways to incorporate advisors from private sector in tourism from the initial stages. Anyone who is in this business will tell you it is not as simple as it looks and it takes a lot longer than many might plan for to get a product accepted in the marketplace. It would be very wise to have a good marketing strategy in place early on and to start building relationships even before a project might be ready to go to market just because it does take time to build.

I would love to see some donor money slated to partnered marketing. My very first post outlined a very transparent and fair way that I have seen work to leverage private and public dollars. (See **full post** below) It turns one dollar into two (or more), shares risk and reward. It is a bottom up approach that has no lower limit so micro sized programs and much larger ones can all participate. This could perhaps be administered by an "ecotourism marketing alliance officer" or something like that in each region or country. I know how we do it here but each region will be different.

Full post:

There are three main guidelines for funding assistance. This is for marketing projects only.

1. The project must be new or incremental. In other words, you can't apply for money to subsidize an existing project.
2. The project must include at least 2 or more partners. Example, a lodge, a transportation company and a village museum.
3. The project must have an objective with a measurable outcome. It could be something like attend an adventure travel trade show in Vancouver and get the product placed in 5 wholesaler catalogues by 2007.

The program funds up to 50% of the hard marketing costs, and the partners fund the balance. The project can be no longer than three years. All projects are assisted by advice from a tourism marketing executive to make the project as successful as possible.

The idea is that by making private sector come up with at least 50%, the projects will be better thought out and planned for success. Having measurable outcomes helps focus. Having partners helps both to raise the pot of available money and really encourages packaging. This makes a product which "consumers" can easily buy.

The project must support the general marketing strategy outlined by the province. In other words, if the province has researched and found 3 primary markets and 3 secondary markets, there is no point spending dollars outside these markets as it would dilute the overall effect of trying to

present the destination.

The thing that always creeps into the equation is transparency. We struggled for years to root out people trying to manipulate the system or for that matter commit outright fraud. The rules have to be adhered to in order for the investor (in this case the Government of Alberta acting as custodians of tax payer's money) to be able to report back that things were fair and level for all.

Well that is a bit longer than I intended to write, but I have found this system to work quite well for SMEs because all too often the top down programs from tourism boards are beyond our reach. The "buy in" is too high. This is a bottom up approach. It implies a level of sophistication and knowledge on the part of the partners, but at the same time with a good program administrator who can advise, it is also a way to provide valuable marketing knowledge and shared risk.

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Acronyms

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A - H

AB - Alberta, Canada
ABC - Aboriginal Business Canada
ACOA - Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency
ADB - Asian Development Bank
AMB-IFC - the private sector arm of the World Bank, empowerment financial services company
ATTA - Adventure Travel Trade Association
B & B - Bed and Breakfast
B to B - Business to Business (as used in both sales and marketing, as opposed to Business to Consumer)
BC - British Columbia
BEST - Business Enterprise for Sustainable Tourism
BOT- Build, Operate and Transfer
BSI – Black Sheep Inn located in Chugchilan, Ecuador
CBE - Community Based Ecotourism
CBT- Community Based Tourism
CDC - Citizens Development Corps
CEO – Chief Executive Officer
CI - Conservation International
CIDA - Canadian International Development Agency
CSR - Corporate Social Responsibility
DMO - Destination Marketing Organization
ECEAT- European Centre for Eco Agro Tourism
FITUR - International Tourism Trade Fair
FSC – Forest Stewardship Council
GDP – Gross Domestic Product
GIS - Geographic Information System
GPS - Global Positioning System
GRI – Global Reporting Initiative- globally applicable sustainability reporting guidelines
GSA – General Sales Agent
GTZ - Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit GmbH (German society for technical cooperation)

I – R

ICT – one of Costa Rica’s Certifications of Sustainable Tourism
IDB – Inter-American Development
IFC - International Finance Corporation
IFI - International Financial Institutions
ISO - International Organization for Standardization

ITB - International Tourism Exchange Berlin
JBIC - Japan Bank for International Cooperation
Lao PDR - Lao People's Democratic Republic
LOHAS - Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability
MERC - Maasai Environmental Resource Coalition, an NGO in Kenya & Tanzania
MET- Media, Environment, and Tourism conference at Planeta.com
META- Marine Ecotourism in the Atlantic Area
METS - Movement for Eco-Tourism in Suriname
NEAP - Australian Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program
NGO - Non-Governmental Organization
ONHAE - Huaorani indigenous organization
PPPs - Public-private-partnerships
PR - public relations
RARE – an international, not-for-profit organization that works to protect natural heritage
RICANCIE - Indigenous Community Network of the Upper Napo for Intercultural Exchange and Ecotourism, (several rural Quichua communities living in the Napo province of Amazonian Ecuador)

S - Z

SEM - Search Engine Marketing (all the efforts to have paid and unpaid listings in search engine work to build your business)
SEMP - Sustainable Environmental Management Project
SEMP-NP - Sustainable Environmental Management Project for Northern Palawan
SEO - Search Engine Optimization (trying to show up on the non-paid listings in Google, Yahoo, etc.)
SERNAP- the Spanish acronym for Bolivia's National Park Service (Servicio Nacional de Áreas Protegidas)
SMART - Sustainable Model for Arctic Regional Tourism
SME - Small and Medium Enterprises
SNV – Netherlands Development Organization
STBW - Sustainable Tourism Bank Watch
STEP - Sustainable Tourism for Poverty Elimination
TDC - Tourism Development Corps (division of CDC)
TIES - The International Ecotourism Society
TOI - Tour Operators' Initiative for Sustainable Tourism Development
TORs - Terms of Reference
UNEP- United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID – United States Agency for International Development
WWF - World Wildlife Fund
WTO - World Tourism Organization
WTTC - World Travel & Tourism Council

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Projects (including ecolodges)

- Algonquin Provincial Park Ecolodge, Canada--
 - www.algonquinparkecolodge.com
- Backpacker Tours-- Online- reservation system focusing on independent travelers
 - www.backpackertours.com
- Black Sheep Inn Ecolodge, Ecuador-- www.blacksheepinn.com.
- Bosque Nublado, Ecuador-- <http://www.santaluciaecuador.com>
- Canyon Travel - Copper Canyon, Mexico-- <http://canyontravel.com>
- Casuarina Beach Club, Barbados--<http://www.casuarina.com/news/awards.html>
- Costa Rica Expeditions -- <http://www.costaricaexpeditions.com>
- Costa Rica Rainforest and Cloud Forest Lodge--Bosque de Paz
 - <http://www.bosquedepaz.com>
- Cree Village Ecolodge, Canada www.creevillage.com.
- Forum anders Resien e.V.-- CBT and environmentally friendly tours
 - www.forumandersreisen.de
- Green Discovery, Laos-- www.greendiscoverylaos.com
- Hotel Kaiser in Tirol, Austria-- www.hotel-kaiser-in-tirol.com
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Thank You

The Emerging Industry Forum was made possible by all of the individuals who contributed. We thank our sponsors, SNV, Conservational International, and Balam Consultores and are appreciative of the cooperation received from USAID and the Development Gateway. Ron Mader and Megan Epler Wood handled all of the organizing duties, and Megan edited the final document and wrote the executive summary. Our forum moderators deserve a great thanks. They were: Oliver Hillel, Steve Noakes, Jeanine Corvetto, Nicole Haeusler, Richard Edwards, and Jeremy Garrett. Holly Jones, working on behalf of EplerWood International, formatted the document, copy edited, and created all of the internal navigation tools. This was a truly cooperative effort and all involved deserve a great thanks for their contributions.

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