

# Ecotourism and commodification: protecting people and places

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The ability of ecotourism to protect both people and places is an unresolved, and growing, concern. Commodification of host culture and environment is a widely reported social impact of tourism and spawns an array of implications regarding indigenous people's view of their places and themselves. The degree of impact from ecotourism development is related to the degree of market development within the indigenous community and their state of decline regarding natural resource scarcity. Pre-existing power differentials between local people and other groups may be exacerbated by ecotourism development. To protect both people and their places, native people's claim to control should be legitimized by conservation and government authorities, particularly indigenous people's role in technical management of the protected area. Regional and national government controls are relevant at the inception of ecotourism development, but ultimately should be reduced to one of infrastructure planning and coordination.

*Keywords:* conservation; tourism; cultural survival; international travel; rural development policies.

## Introduction

Ecotourism is promoted as a means of achieving community development and preservation of natural environments. The hope of ecotourism is the formation of a symbiotic relationship between tourism, indigenous people and natural areas. In an idealized model of ecotourism, an integration of conservation and development occurs in which entrepreneurs, government agents, and tourists strive to create sustainable relationships with the environment while improving the welfare of local people (cf. Kutay, 1989; Fennell and Eagles, 1990; Lee and Snepenger, 1991; Wallace, 1992).

The objectives in this paper are to review critically the promises and reality of ecotourism in relation to the goals of conservation and development, and to suggest some limits to the potential of ecotourism to move towards those goals. Speculation is provided on what ecotourism can and cannot offer hosts and guests. Ecotourism can have both positive and negative effects on indigenous people. It is argued that promoting ecotourism on the basis that it improves the welfare of indigenous people is disingenuous, at best. Rather, ecotourism should be portrayed as a source of revenue to fund parks and other protected areas that needs multiple levels of control if it is to have a positive net effect on indigenous people.

### **Emergence of ecotourism**

Over the past few decades, tourism has grown to be among the world's top three industries, along with oil and motor vehicles (World Tourism Organization, 1991; Harrison, 1992a; Fletcher and Latham, 1995). Along with this growth, market segmentation, based on an increasing diversity in traveller preferences and spurred by the travel industry's ability to cater to such diverse preferences, has occurred. Interest in the environment also has increased and has been a major influence on segmentation within the travel market.

In response to the rhetoric of the current environmental movement emphasizing the need for individuals to become involved in conservation on a daily basis and in all aspects of their lives (Miller, 1994), a well-educated, globally aware segment of travellers has emerged. They are keenly interested in learning first-hand about natural areas, and want to provide incentives to indigenous people to protect such areas (cf. Eadington and Smith, 1992; Boo, 1992). Contributing to the formation of this travel segment is a disillusionment with impacts of resort-style tourism in places such as Waikiki in the US, Costa Brava in Spain, and the Gold Coast in Australia (Farrell, 1992). The response of the travel industry has been to cultivate various segments of an environmentally-aware market (e.g. ecotourism, alternative tourism, science tourism, cultural tourism).

Government agencies, planners, and development bankers view tourism as a means of providing jobs, incomes, foreign exchange and tax revenues. Compared to other types of industrial development, the environmental impacts of tourism development are perceived as being less negative. Thus, the international development community is motivated to use tourism, based on the attraction of natural environments, to improve the economic welfare of indigenous people.

Ecotourism takes advantage of travellers interested in natural areas and their protection. The literature on ecotourism, however, encompasses more than just a merging of conservation with capitalism. With varying degrees of explicitness, the literature also embraces concern for the economic and social welfare of indigenous people, and at times, appears to portray ecotourism as a weapon for the defence of cultures (Farrell and Runyan, 1991). From its inception, Hetzer (1965, as cited in Grenier *et al.* 1993) proposed that ecotourism should have a minimum impact on, and maximum respect for, host cultures. Boeger (1991, p. 2) discusses ecotourism as respecting 'the dignity and diversity of other cultures'. The brochure of the Ecotourism Society (a non-governmental trade organization founded in 1990) states that ecotourism 'sustains the well-being of local people'. A series of reports from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) have been most cautious about claiming links between ecotourism, local people, and protected areas (e.g. Boo, 1992). However, the WWF recognizes the relevance of local peoples in global conservation efforts and has initiated a programme to 'improve the quality of life' of such people. In this sense, ecotourism has been presented as different from other kinds of tourism in that it claims to be controlled development that builds healthy relationships between protected areas, tourists and indigenous people.

In championing ecotourism as beneficial for indigenous people, however, its promoters have stumbled upon issues concerning the social justice of tourism. Although exceptions exist, the tourism literature is generally cynical regarding the relationship between indigenous people and their encounters with tourists. (Injustices that occurred when natural environments were opened to tourists and closed to traditional uses by indigenous people are well-documented (Reynoso y Valle and de Regt, 1979; Eadington and Smith, 1992).) A framework upon which much of this cynicism is built can be usefully applied to

ecotourism, and serves to delimit the scope of its effectiveness as a tool for local development.

### **The reality of the tourist**

In his essay on the lost art of travel, Boorstin (1987) points out that travelling was once uncomfortable, difficult and expensive. In tracing the etymological roots of 'travel', he found them to be synonymous with the roots of 'travail' (meaning 'trouble', 'work', or 'torment') and suggested that, prior to the 19th century, travelling was considered a strenuous search for other peoples and adventure (Boorstin, 1987, pp. 84–85). In contrast, he characterizes present-day travellers as being passive, expecting to purchase travel-related services easily, and gullibly enjoying the thrills of risking their life without taking any real risks at all (p. 80; cf. MacCannell, 1973; Cohen, 1988).

The changed nature of travel is partly a result of improvements in both access and geographical knowledge. Formerly 'remote' areas are no longer such because of improved transportation. Cartographers have mapped the globe at increasingly larger scales (Johnston and Edwards, 1994). Anthropologists have studied and reported on most of the world's cultures. Journalists and the media literally bring the world to our front doorsteps on an everyday basis.

Prior to the 20th century, travel to remote places required an entourage of pack stock or bearers and heavy camping equipment, all under the direction of guides. Within the past few decades, this explorer style of travel has been replaced with rapid, less strenuous modes of transportation, lightweight gear, and expanding options for western-style lodging. In essence, that which was once a year's journey between continents and into uncharted territory, is now a carefully scheduled, risk-free, two-week 'adventure' (Turner and Ash, 1975; Boorstin, 1987).

Anticipation is an important part of the travel experience, and the expectations and images of that experience held by tourists are created and fed by numerous agents. Travel guidebooks, magazines and videos are available by the hundreds. The behaviour expected of tourists comes from the advice of various professionals in the travel industry who encourage them to 'discover' remote areas. Conversations with friends and acquaintances, who have completed the journey, serve to define the prospective experience. The mass marketing of outdoor wear and the images presented in mail-order catalogues furnish prospective tourists with powerful inducements for conformity. From a variety of sources, people have become thoroughly accustomed to accepting images as invitations to behaviour and as normative standards by which to evaluate their own behaviour (Boorstin, 1987, p. 192). In many ways, travel opportunities have come to be packaged experiences that are sold as commodities to a consuming culture. Not only can adventure be packed into two weeks, but the well-defined expectations are guaranteed!

Tourism has the potential to bring a new socio-cultural reality to the host community. The tourists come to the host community not only with their expectations and images, but with the economic power to fulfil them. Their expenditures are a powerful force and can substantially alter the host community's way of life (Nash, 1981; Grenier *et al.*, 1993). The differential in economic power between hosts and guests can lead to dependency, causing some scholars to view tourism as imperialism (de Kadt, 1979, pp. 50–67; Meyer, 1988; Nash, 1989), neocolonialism (Turner and Ash, 1975; Britton, 1982), or structurally-maintained underdevelopment (Lea, 1988, Harrison, 1992a).

### Commodification of nature

The intrusion of guests, along with their monetary power, transforms the hosts' native environment and culture into commodities. What were once places for the activities of daily life, as well as the activities themselves, have become valued as market commodities (Watson and Kopachevsky, 1994). What may have been a traditional relationship between one's people and environment, becomes a pattern of living in which behaviour is influenced by, and dependent upon, market transactions.

In a widely cited example of the commodification of culture, Greenwood (1977) discusses the collapse of the *Alarde*, a Basque festival in Spain. The centuries-old festival, celebrating the victory by the Basques over the French siege of 1638 AD, symbolized the Basques' collective valour. The festival was a source of pride for the townsfolk, and preparations for it took months to complete and involved most of the townsfolk – young and old, rich and poor.

In the late 1960s, the Spanish government declared that the performance central to the *Alarde* be performed twice on the festival day in order to accommodate the growing number of tourists. This order transformed the *Alarde* from a festival for and by the residents into a show for tourists. Attitudes toward the *Alarde* consequently changed from enthusiasm to indifference; two years after the declaration, the Spanish government was considering paying the townsfolk to perform in order to maintain the festival (Greenwood, 1977, pp. 131–135).

Since Greenwood's essay was published, others have identified touristic situations involving commodification. The common thread in these discussions is a change in the meaning attributed to a host activity or object. This change is from one of intrinsic value within a customary context to that of an artifact of exchange (Cohen, 1988). In addition, the audience for an activity or object has changed from the host to the guest. Watson and Kopachevsky (1994), in fact, argue that the relationship between host and guest presumes commodification (see also Simmel (1950) for his insight on interaction with 'strangers'). Guests require access to, and information about, the local environment. The hosts are in a position to sell access and expertise, leading them to a market relationship with the guests.

For indigenous people, the commodification of nature implies a change in the meaning of their environment from a source of direct sustenance with a use value to a commodity with an exchange value. This change expresses a shift in the relationship between the indigenous people and their environment, from one of working *with* the land to one of working *for* tourists (who observe the land). This shift, from traditional, life-sustaining activities to service activities, may be perceived as negative in many indigenous cultures (Lea, 1988; Place, 1991). Hence, the commodification of nature not only changes an indigenous people's view of their places, but also their view of themselves.

Commodification is facilitated by concepts such as 'national park', 'protected area', 'endangered species', 'virgin forest' and 'intact ecosystem' that are social constructs of western societies and cultural artifacts of the developed world (cf Huth, 1957; Nash, 1982). Areas designated as parks or protected areas become objects in the western mind and are likely to be thought of as existing independently of man and culture (Hayles, 1995; Shepard, 1995; see also Whitehead (1931) for his discussion on 'misplaced concreteness'). To the ecotourist, they are places to be seen and experienced, that is, consumed. They become identified as ecological travel objectives and the travel industry proceeds to create

the facilities necessary for travellers to reach and experience them. In other words, a market for them is created.

Parks, though they may be viewed as 'preserved' or 'pristine' environments, are managed in varying degrees of intensity to appear natural (cf. Allen and Hoekstra (1992) pp. 271–274, regarding the 'pristine' biosphere and the human impacted world; see also, McKibben (1989), Cronon (1984), Kaufman (1994) pp. 97–101). In this sense, parks are contrived settings often staged as authentic representations of untainted, raw nature (cf. Chase (1986), Bonnicksen (1989), Botkin (1990) pp. 193–197). Their authenticity is a perceived property, rather than an intrinsic property of the park itself (cf. Ehrentraut, 1993; Soule, 1995).

Hummon (1988) has suggested that alienation in modern lifestyles motivates some to travel in search of authentic experiences. Sociologist Erving Goffman (1959) divided environments into 'front' and 'back' regions. The front is the meeting place of hosts and guests, the back is where the hosts relax between 'performances'. The back, being closed to outsiders, is thought to be authentic; the front is thought to be a show. Adapting Goffman's framework, MacCannell (1973) argues that tourist settings represent a staged authenticity. He claimed that most tourist settings are false backs – fronts in the guise of backs – in which authenticity is objectified by the tourist (Cohen, 1988). Coming from a different approach, Boorstin (1987, p. 99) reached a similar conclusion about touristic experience:

'Attractions' offer an elaborately contrived indirect experience, an artificial product to be consumed in the very places where the real thing is free as air.

In his essay on the contemporary inability to understand nature, Shepard (1995, pp. 17–18) criticizes the recently emerged discipline of restoration ecology by arguing that:

Restoration ecologists are 'in the same boat with museum curators making dioramas or habitat groups; who claim to be making artificial reproductions of the past or present world – and who are, therefore ... lost in the vapors of their own imaginations without a compass or a satellite'.

Such dioramas, be they a protected area or contained in a museum, become authentic to the observer owing to their contextual staging and the interpreted meanings consequent to that staging. In this sense, the authenticity of the diorama is a socially defined construct rather than a discovery about the external world, but no less real to the observer.

The ecotourist arrives with a reality created from a culturally derived set of images of the host natural environment and culture. Hosts work to maintain the ecotourist's reality by accommodating the images he or she brings. The hosts stage the precise aspects of experience that ecotourists view as marks of authenticity (Cohen, 1988). Indeed, serious ecotourists, with their enthusiasm for environmental causes, may be eager to embrace as genuine the ecotour events which they are served. Thus, they leave feeling that the park is in some state of 'protection', that their travelling – at least in principle – advanced 'global conservation', and that indigenous people are in some transitional stage of a 'sustainable' lifestyle. Such meanings come from the ecotourists' interaction with the entrepreneurs, indigenous people, and environments of their ecotour.

The ecotourism industry, by its efforts to maintain the reality of ecotourists, can produce contrasts in value and behaviour that overwhelm the local culture. Not only does the indigenous people's environment become commodified, but so does their labour. When indigenous people's lifestyle turns to serving the tourists, rather than working in the fields

or forests, the authentic aspects of their way of life become blurred (Turner and Ash, 1975; Sweet, 1989).

### **Implications of commodification**

The discussion has described commodification as a socio-cultural process from the standpoint of the tourist and the indigenous culture. This section addresses socio-cultural-economic implications of that process.

One of the cultural complexities is the meaning of 'indigenous people'. It is not clear who such people are. Are they the local people of whatever origin? Are they only the 'pure blooded' descendants of those people who inhabited the area/region prior to its 'discovery' by the western world? Are they the collection of all the people in the host country? As the geographical scale of one's perspective increases, one's view of who constitutes 'indigenous' becomes more inclusive. The diversity of the cultures and people represented increases with scale (Durning, 1992), with subcultures existing in, and making up, a larger cultural matrix. For the purposes of this paper, a working description of 'indigenous people' follows: descendants of original inhabitants; distinct in language, culture, or religion from the dominant population; who see themselves as custodians and caretakers, not owners, of their habitats; who define themselves partly in terms of their habitat; who have a subsistence economy involving direct dependence on their habitat; and who manage resources collectively, often by consensus of elders.

For these people, the negative impacts of ecotourism are likely to be very large. Their traditional and insular cultures are easily overwhelmed by the injection of the strongly contrasting, external cultural influences, primarily commodification, that accompany ecotourism development.

At base, commodification is the process of changing a cultural element, such as a household craft, or a natural object such as a native plant or animal community, into a commodity that can be exchanged in a monetary market; in essence, taking something that was not marketed and turning it into something that is. Most cultures have been affected to some degree by the market-oriented culture of the western industrial world (Harrison, 1992a); tourism, typically, is not the instrument by which a culture is initiated to markets. The degree of market development already present in a local economy will influence the impact of commodification; the greater the degree of market development, the less disruptive will be the development of ecotourism.

Pre-existing political and economic power differentials may be reinforced by ecotourism development (Harrison, 1992b). Indigenous people usually are in the weakest power position compared to other segments of society. Typically, they lack the capital and education necessary to invest in ecotourism and have only their labour to sell to the tourism industry. Due to a variety of socio-cultural barriers, they 'qualify' for only the most menial jobs in the industry. Tourism typically parallels other forms of development wherein outside organizations gain control of a community's basic natural resources leaving the indigenous people almost totally dependent upon those same outside organizations for their livelihoods. Since indigenous people are unlikely to participate comfortably in decision-making forums, their ability to affect change, in an emergent social system in which they find themselves, is limited. In addition, pre-existing power relations *within* some indigenous populations have prompted Johnston and Edwards (1994) to

argue that even if local participation in tourism decision-making was attainable, it would not necessarily ensure participation for the socially collective good.

'Protection' of all or portions of their places of daily living for ecological purposes may result in drastic impacts on indigenous people. Protection of natural areas may mean that access to and use of them by indigenous people is restricted. (In many cases, the indigenous people have held *de facto* property rights to these resources, but receive no compensation for them when areas are 'protected' because their governments have not recognized their rights as *de jure*.) Moreover, given the direct physical and spiritual dependence of these people on their habitats, withdrawal of access and use can cause great harm to them. A consequence may be their strong opposition to, and possible obstruction of protection efforts.

Positive impacts of ecotourism are likely to be the greatest when the indigenous culture is already in a state of decline as a result of natural resource scarcity. In such cases, the people may realize that change is needed and may be prepared for it. The Annapurna Conservation Area Project in Nepal was appealing to local villagers, in part, because of their recognition of the severe deforestation and erosion, and felt a need to change (Rowell, 1989).

Opportunities for profit in the transportation, accommodation, and guide service elements of the ecotourist travel system are avenues from which commodification emerges. Two major determinants of these profits are the number of tourists served and their lengths of stay. In general, ecotourist firms have an incentive to encourage visitation up to that point at which their profits are maximized. Unfortunately, the profit maximizing level of visitation may be associated with undesirable levels of impact and overwhelm the indigenous culture, causing serious social problems.

Those who make profits from environmental attractions seemingly would have incentives to prevent degradation of the attractions. One of the difficulties, however, is that the attractive nature of environmental phenomena is socially defined. As the globally desirable dioramas of ecotourism change, the local tourism industry will strive to maintain its authenticity for the ecotourist, and probably will be successful enough to maintain visitation levels that threaten the perceived ecological health of the protected area. Such changes in the staging of the ecotourism context is a politically difficult issue to address, but one that should be done within a context of checks and balances.

The nexus of ecotourism and commodification, and especially its implications for indigenous peoples, demonstrate the need to work to avoid negative social and environmental impacts.

### **Protection versus local control: dilemma?**

Ecotourism development often has been imposed from the national level with local indigenous people excluded from the planning, preparation, and implementation phases of ecotourism development projects. The exclusion of indigenous people is an artifact of protectionist policies which elevate an area from being a local resource to being a national or international attraction. As the resource becomes valued at these higher levels, the perceived validity of the claims of the indigenous people declines. Moreover, while the consumptive uses of an area by indigenous people are readily observed, more so than non-consumptive uses, outsiders may be ignorant of indigenous land-use practices. These factors can lead to a spurious conclusion that the ecological *protection* of an area and local *control* of an area are mutually exclusive.

Who should control ecotourism development? This question needs to be distinguished from 'Who *can* control ecotourism development?'. The former question is idealistic and associated with broad policy goals; the latter question is rhetorical and asserts the grim practicality that control over any type of economic development is problematic. Regarding the 'should' question, indigenous people (those directly dependent on the resource) have a claim to control because they know the resource, may have at least *de facto* property rights to it, and have the fewest alternative sources of livelihood. However, agencies and organizations at the regional, national and international levels may have the political power, organizational skills, capital and technical know-how to manage protected areas and to develop the ecotourism facilities. Ideally, control should come from multiple levels, with as much participation by indigenous people as possible. The protection of an area coupled with local participation in decision-making are not mutually exclusive, but are considered an important coupling for sustainable development.

Participation by indigenous people in the planning, preparation, and implementation of ecotourism development raises a number of issues (Kiss, 1990). The extent of participation by indigenous people in decision-making is directly related to their tendency to support protection policies. Through participation, indigenous people pass on their knowledge of resources as well as information about their traditional land-use practices. This knowledge and information would legitimize continued access and would partially delimit management goals of the protected area.

Identification and recruitment of representatives from within the indigenous community is an important issue. If an elite group is relied upon that is not recognized by the rest of the community as having authority, then decisions will not be respected, and support for development will be lacking. On the other hand, participation based on a model of inclusive democracy is a mistake in communities where decision-making is done through consensus among a group of elders. While the international conservation community tends to favour inclusive participatory decision-making, it is important to identify the proper indigenous institutions and leaders with whom to work.

Participation by the indigenous community includes participation in the benefits of development (Kiss, 1990). Payment to local people may be necessary until the direct benefits of ecotourism become a reality, or such payments may be viewed as continuing compensation to indigenous communities as stewards of a national resource. The distribution of such payments among members of the community is best left to a local institution, provided it is truly representative of the community and its authority is respected.

Negative cultural impacts of allowing tourist visitation to traditional lands can be reduced if indigenous people become decision-makers regarding the amount, location, timing and nature of tourist visitation to protected areas. Such participation has the potential to empower local people to control their own fate and direction of cultural change (cf. MacCannell, 1984; Nason, 1984; Grahn, 1991). Tourist visitation at certain times and places may disrupt or prevent traditional resource uses by indigenous people, but may not be disruptive at other times and places. The commodification of some cultural events and places may be viewed as desirable by indigenous people, and of other events and places as undesirable.

Participation and control at the local level will not succeed without involvement from higher levels. The participation and control by indigenous people must be sanctioned by the national government if it is to be effective. The delegation of such authority does not



come easily for many national administrations. In most cases, however, initiation of protected status designation and ecotourism development will come from outside the indigenous community, specifically from international and national organizations who have political influence with national governments, and who can secure sanctions for local authority. These sanctions include recognition, through the legal system, of the use-rights held by indigenous people.

National control of capital investment in ecotourism development may be necessary to ensure a pace and quality of development that will contribute to the goal of protection with minimum negative social impacts at the local level. This control can be exercised through indirect means such as land use controls, environmental regulation, and provision of public infrastructure or by more direct means such as state planning, development and ownership.

Technical management of protected areas will need to be done by national organizations until local individuals have been motivated and trained to perform on-the-ground management functions. The tendency of such national organizations to become large, ineffective, revenue-consuming bureaucracies is a danger to local control and to effective protection. Management by local institutions can avoid this problem, but is dependent on indigenous support for protection, participation in benefits, and education and training. With a long-term goal of technical management by indigenous people, conflict between national conservation agencies and local communities may be reduced (cf. Rowell, 1989; Kiss, 1990).

Achieving a mix of national and local or indigenous control of ecotourism that is effective in moving toward the protection goal, while minimizing negative cultural impacts, is not easy. The following example, however, demonstrates that there is a basis for optimism.

### **An illustrative case**

Uluru National Park, containing Ayer's Rock, in Australia provides an example of the involvement of local indigenous people in the protection of an area. The Park contains an abundance of rock art, paintings by the ancestors of the Australian aborigines, but, when the Park was first established, non-indigenous managers were unable to satisfy the tourists' interest in aboriginal art and interpretation of the land.

The passage of the Northern Territory Lands Rights Act in 1976 provided a means of satisfying that interest. The Act enabled local aboriginal groups to regain rights to portions of parks, but with the stipulation that they lease the land back to the government for 100 years.

Under the terms of the Uluru lease, the Uluru Katatjuta Board of Management was established with an aboriginal majority membership that provided the aborigines with considerable influence over Park planning and management, and some were employed as interpreters and maintenance workers (Alanen, 1992). According to Alanen (1992), reliable information is now available from the aborigines about the Park's resources and about their culture, and the aborigines' involvement has renewed their interest in their culture and strengthened its integrity.

The aborigines' influence, however, stops at the Park boundaries. During the 1970s, various tourist development enclaves were removed from the Park and a new, compatibly designed development was built outside the Park boundaries. Pressures, however, are

being exerted to locate incompatible land uses, such as a golf course, on lands near the Park over which the aborigines have no control.

In this case, the 1976 land rights legislation provided the aborigines with the lever to gain access and input to the planning process and, through them, to the management of the park. In this case, *de facto* property rights were given limited *de jure* status. (Consequent court decisions in Australia have provided even greater recognition of the aborigines' property rights to land (cf Phillips, 1993).) Although of a lesser degree, a pre-existing power differential was maintained by the requirement that land be leased back to the government. The lease-back provision served the national goals of protection and access for the dominant population while providing immediate and continuing monetary benefits to the local aborigines. Further, the involvement of local indigenous people in the planning and management of the protected area has had beneficial cultural impacts in that it reinforced a positive cultural identity.

Among other things, the example demonstrates the need to control tourist development. The proposed developments on nearby lands do not contribute to the protection of the Park's resources and may in fact have negative environmental and cultural impacts. Control from national or territorial governments will be necessary to ensure compatible land uses near the Park. Involvement of the aborigines in the planning of ecotourism facilities beyond the Park boundaries could mould the character of the facilities to fit the natural environment.

## Conclusion

Ecotourism is a potential source of revenue for the funding of parks and other protected areas. It brings with it, however, commodification of elements of indigenous cultures and their habitats. This commodification, in turn, can have serious negative impacts unless effective controls can be imposed upon the industry.

Control of ecotourism and access to its decision-making forums should be designed from multiple levels. Participation, either direct or indirect, by local indigenous communities in all phases of planning and implementation, are important factors in minimizing the negative impacts of ecotourism on indigenous people. Indeed, such participation has the potential for creating positive cultural and environmental impacts.

Indigenous people also need to participate in the benefits of ecotourism. In addition to equity considerations, sharing revenues with indigenous people reduces their dependence on the protected area for subsistence, and thus could enhance protection. Some critics would argue that such a reduction is in fact a negative cultural impact. However, if the indigenous people are involved in decisions and participate in management of protected areas, they maintain a sense of control over their own relationship with their habitat; such a sense of control over their own fate may strengthen their cultural identity.

National level controls are necessary to coordinate infrastructure development with local planning, and to provide checks on the speed and quality of ecotourism development. To legitimize the rights of indigenous people, the national government also must delegate authority by sanctioning local controls.

Ecotourism is not a panacea – simply one way to finance protected areas. At a minimum, ecotourism requires that technical managers become involved in understanding the cultural issues that arise from establishing protected areas. In its ideal sense, ecotourism

requires full-fledged cooperation and a spirit of partnership between various levels of government and indigenous people.

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