

Ecotourism from a Conceptual Perspective, an Extended Definition of a Unique Tourism Form

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to develop and present an extended definition of the concept of ecotourism, which has been used and misused in many ways. Ecotourism is not farm tourism, nature tourism or adventure tourism, but a unique tourism form that has become very popular due to the greening of markets, increasing knowledge of the fragility of the environment, better informed managers, and the recognition that there is a close relationship between good ecology and good economy. Ecotourism has been defined in many different ways in the literature, but one of the most central dimensions, co-operation, has not been included. Ecotourism must be sustainable and four central groups of actors have to co-operate, the local people, the authorities, tourists and companies involved in tourism. The understanding of what ecotourism is and stands for is very diverse and the discussion found in Finland is used as an illustrative case in this article. The general view in Finland is that sustainable tourism should be used instead of the concept of ecotourism. A position, which can cause large problems for the development of ecotourism in Finland. Copyright © 2000 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism is a fuzzy concept (Valentine, 1993), defined and named in many different ways (Björk, 1995). Valentine (1993) presents a list of 18 concepts that have been used to describe nature-based tourism, and before Allcock *et al.* (1993, p. 15) defined ecotourism as 'nature-based tourism that includes an educational component and is managed to be sustainable', they examined five different definitions of ecotourism. The many different definitions of ecotourism found in the literature support what D'Ayala (1995) claims, that ecotourism is an elusive concept. What kind of areas ecotourism incorporates is not always obvious in the literature. To say that the difference between ecotourism and nature tourism is 'that ecotourism is tourism that depends primarily on living things in natural systems' (Tisdell, 1996, p. 12) is a restricted view and only partly in line with what Ayala (1996, p. 54) states, 'ecotourism involves both environmental and cultural-heritage aspects'. Burch (1997) uses the concept of cultural ecotourism and it is also not obvious here what the differences are between ecotourism and cultural ecotourism. Ecotourism must be sustainable, but the relationships between sustainable tourism and ecotourism have not always been explicitly discussed (e.g. Manning and Dougherty, 1995).

Ecotourism is, without doubt, surrounded by confusion, and in contrast to Pearce (1994)

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and Blamey (1997), who claim that it is futile to develop a single definition of a specific tourism form, we find it essential to develop strict definitions of all kinds of nature-based tourism, i.e. definitions including all the most central dimensions. Only by first having a strict theoretical definition (an ideal situation) is it possible to go on and adjust the dimensions in accordance with the unique characteristics of a specific tourism area.

Ecotourism is assuredly not a homogeneous phenomenon if we take a global perspective, but a common core idea can be elicited that includes a handful of central dimensions. These dimensions are used in this article, where an extended definition of ecotourism is developed and the uniqueness of this tourism form stressed. Many definitions of the concept of ecotourism have been presented, but an explicit comparison based on their central dimensions is still not available (Higgins, 1996). Different researchers have stressed different dimensions in their definitions (e.g. Valentine, 1991; Cater, 1994). Our deep engagement in tourism planning and marketing will of course bias our definition, but a complete understanding of a concept cannot be generated if it is not viewed from different perspectives.

This paper is structured as follows. The central dimensions found in some often used definitions of ecotourism are compared and analysed in the second section. The semantic meaning of ecotourism is elucidated, actors engaged in ecotourism are discussed, and the principles of sustainable tourism development that ecotourism should embrace are listed. Based on these analyses and discussions an extended definition of ecotourism is developed. The second section is concluded by a comparison of ecotourism to nature tourism and adventure tourism. The potential of developing and marketing ecotourism resorts has been discussed in most countries. Finland is used as an illustrative case in this article to show the variety of interpretations of the ecotourism concept found in one country. Ecotourism in Finland is discussed in the third section of this article. A summary of the discussion and research questions generated is presented in the fourth and final section.

ECOTOURISM – A DEFINITION

Western (1993) states that conservation will improve if we shift from a definition of ecotourism as small-scale tourism to a set of principles applicable to any nature-based tourism. The idea that all tourism should be developed in accordance with the principles of sustainable tourism is supported, but it is also important to develop as precise a definition as possible of the different tourism forms, e.g. ecotourism. A considerable number of definitions of ecotourism can be found in the tourism literature and some of the ones discussed are listed here.

Ecotourism = tourism based principally upon natural and archaeological resources such as birds and other wildlife, scenic areas, reefs, caves, fossil sites, archaeological sites, wetlands, and areas of rare or endangered species (Hetzer, 1965).

Ecotourism = a form of tourism inspired primarily by the natural history of an area, including its indigenous cultures. The ecotourist visits relatively undeveloped areas in the spirit of appreciation, participation and sensitivity. The ecotourist practices a non-consumptive use of wildlife and natural resources and contributes to the visited area through labour or financial means aimed at directly, benefiting the conservation of the site and the economic well-being of the local residents (Ziffer, 1989).

Ecotourism = tourism that involves travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of admiring, studying, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any cultural features (both past and present) found in the areas (Ceballos-Lascuráin, 1991).

Ecotourism = travel to remote or natural areas which aims to enhance understanding and appreciation of the natural environment and cultural heritage while avoiding damage or deterioration of the experience for others (P. Figgis, unpub-

lished data, 1992).

Ecotourism = tourism to natural areas that fosters environmental understanding, appreciation and conservation and sustains the culture and well-being of local communities (Young, 1992).

Ecotourism = ecologically sustainable tourism that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation (Ecotourism Association of Australia, 1992).

Ecotourism = nature based tourism that is ecologically sustainable and is based on relatively undisturbed natural areas; is non-damaging and non-degrading; provides a direct contribution to the continued protection and management of protected areas used; and is subject to an adequate and appropriate management regime (Valentine, 1991, 1993).

Ecotourism = an enlightening nature travel experience that contributes to conservation of the ecosystem, while respecting the integrity of host communities (Wight, 1993).

Ecotourism = a nature travel experience that contributes to conservation of the environment while maintaining and enhancing the integrity of the natural and social-cultural elements (Scace, 1993).

Ecotourism = nonconsumptive natural history-based and/or wildlife-related recreation activities such as bird watching, wildlife watching, nature photography, whale watching, botanical study, and wildlife treks to safaris (Hvenegaard, 1994).

Ecotourism = tourists travelling to a particular 'natural site' entirely because of the amenity and recreational value derived from having contact with some aspect of the natural world (Steele, 1995).

Ecotourism = an activity where the tourist travels to nature areas in order to admire,

study and enjoy the existing nature and culture in a way that does not exploit the resources, but contribute to the conservation of the genuine environment (Björk, 1995).

Ecotourism = travel to relatively undisturbed natural areas for study, enjoyment, or volunteer assistance. It is travel that concerns itself with the flora, fauna, geology, and ecosystem of an area, as well as the people who live nearby, their needs, their culture, and their relationship to the land. It views natural areas both as "home to all of us" in a global sense but "home to nearby residents" specifically. It is envisioned as a tool for both conservation and sustainable development - especially in areas where local people are asked to forgo the consumptive use of resources for others (Wallace and Pierce, 1996).

Pihlström (1993, p. 2) defines an ecotourist in the following manner: She or he wants to study, admire and enjoy the scenery, plants, animals and culture in undisturbed nature areas. ('Hän haluaa tutkia, ihailia ja nauttia maisemasta, luonnon kasveista ja eläimistä sekä kulttuuri-ilmentymistä häiritsemättömillä luontoalueilla'.)

An examination of the definitions presented shows that there are common dimensions, which can be used when making a comparison between the definitions. Four main dimensions were used in this comparison (Table 1). The first dimension selected corresponds to the questions: what are the characteristics of the area? What is the visited environment like? The second dimension corresponds to the question: what will the tourists do in the resort? The object, what kind of resources the tourists are interested in is the third dimension, and the fourth dimension analysed is the effects of the tourists' behaviour.

A summary of Table 1 shows that although several different definitions have been presented, the core dimensions are almost the same. The area the ecotourists are visiting is (or should be) undisturbed, and nature and culture are in focus. The tourists should admire, study and enjoy these elements in a non-degrading manner. To conserve and con-

Table 1. The content of ecotourism^a

Authors	Dimensions			
	Characteristics of the area	What the tourists do	Object	Behaviour
Hetzer, 1965	Natural and archaeological areas			
Ziffer, 1989	Indigenous and undeveloped areas	Appreciating, participating, and sensing	The history of an area, including its culture	Non-consumptive and contributes to sustainability
Ceballos-Lascuráin, 1991	Undisturbed and uncontaminated areas	Admiring, studying, and enjoying	Wild plants and animals, and cultural features	
P. Figgis, unpublished data, 1992	Remote or natural areas	Understanding and appreciating	Nature and culture	Non-damaging or deterioration
Young, 1992	Natural areas	Understanding, appreciating and conserving	Nature and culture	Includes a conservation and sustaining aspect
Ecotourism Association of Australia, 1992		Understanding, appreciating and conserving	Nature and culture	Includes a conservation aspect
Valentine, 1991, 1993	Undisturbed areas		Nature	Non-damaging and non-degrading
Wight, 1993	Nature areas	Experiencing and conserving	Nature	Conservation of the ecosystem and respect for the host communities
Scace, 1993	Nature		Nature	Conservation of the environment, maintaining and enhancing the integrity of the natural and sociocultural elements
Hvenegaard, 1994	Nature and culture based activities		Nature and culture	Non-consumptive
Steele, 1995	Natural site	Admiring, studying and enjoying	Natural world	Includes a non-exploitation and a conservation aspect
Björk, 1995	Nature areas	Studying, enjoying, and assisting	Nature and culture	A tool for both conservation and sustainable development
Wallace and Pierce, 1996	Undisturbed natural areas		Flora, fauna, geology, ecosystem of an area, culture and people	

^a A blank entry indicates that nothing was mentioned in the definition.

Table 2. The sustainable development principles that ecotourism should embrace (X = stressed by the author/authors)

Principles	Authors						
	Wallace and Pierce (1996)	Prosser (1994)	Wight (1994)	Boers and Bosch (1994)	Allcock <i>et al.</i> (1993)	Cater (1993)	Butler (1993)
Ecotourism should be non-consumptive	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Environment influences the behaviour of the actors involved in tourism	X	X	X	X		X	X
The local situation influences the development	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Long-term planning must be in focus	X	X	X	X		X	
Ecotourism must support the local economy	X	X			X	X	
Ecotourism has to support the local development	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Ecotourism must be dynamic				X			
Moral and ethical aspects must be considered			X				X
The needs of the visitors must be considered				X		X	X
Ecotourism should be an enlightened experience of authentic areas	X	X	X				X
Ecotourism should be educative	X	X	X				
Ecotourism must not destroy for other industries	X				X		

tribute are prestige words and Ziffer (1989, p. 1) states that 'the goal of "ecotourism" is to capture a portion of the enormous global tourism market by attracting visitors to natural areas and using the revenues to fund local conservation and fuel economic development'.

The importance of creating a balance between economic development and environmental conservation was stressed in an early development phase of ecotourism (Grenier *et al.*, 1993; Shanklin, 1993). The importance of a balance between different interests can today also be found in many guidelines for a sustainable tourism development (D'Amore, 1992). The balance approach has been questioned by Hunter (1995, 1997), who thinks that sustainable tourism development is not always in line with sustainable development in a broader context and finds that a balance in reality is more often a trade-off. What Hunter (1997, p. 864) claims is that sustainable tourism should be regarded as an adaptive paradigm and he states that 'sustainable tourism research would benefit from a closer inspection of the broader sustainable development literature'. The principles for sustainable development constitute today the base that researchers use when developing principles for ecotourism (Kjessel and Larsson, 1993) (Table 2). Sustainability = 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (McKercher, 1993, p. 132). Sustainable tourism = 'tourism which is in a form which can maintain its viability in an area for an indefinite period of time' (Butler, 1993, p. 29). Guidelines for ecotourism have been developed by Blangy and Wood (1993) and for sustainable tourism management by Bramwell *et al.* (1996).

An analysis of the principles listed in Table 2 indicates that ecotourism is a form of tourism that does not exceed the carrying capacity of an area, but contributes to sustainable development and conservation. Ecotourism must be non-consumptive and the level and scope of ecotourism is determined by the fragility of the environment (nature, culture, social). The local economy must be supported and a long-term perspective must dominate. The tourist industry must support a sustainable development and an ethical, dynamic management ap-

proach should be adopted (Malloy and Fennell, 1998). The importance of the customers, i.e. tourists, must not be forgotten, but included in a balanced approach. The ecotourists must be offered genuine areas and possibilities to take part, be active and learn. All actors should benefit from an ecotourism development, at least, in the long run, and an ecotourism resort must be considered as part of a larger context. It is, therefore, not enough to focus only on the resort, but the surroundings must also be included in the development plan, thus Ayala (1996) proposes a 'resort-plus' master-plan.

Hetzer (1965) was one of the first to present a definition of ecotourism, a definition with a focus on the area where the tourists travel (Fennell, 1998). Definitions presented more recently have most often been of a multi-focus character. Where tourists travel and what they do at the resort are two dimensions included (e.g. Ceballos-Lascuráin's definition (1991)). Even a dimension embracing the effects of ecotourism has been added to the definitions (Ceballos-Lascuráin, 1996). All these dimensions are essential, but not enough to define ecotourism as a specific tourism form, one where the balance between ecological, economic, social and cultural aspects of development is in focus.

The ecotourism concept can be divided into two words – *eco* and *tourism*. Mill (1990, p. 21) defines tourism as 'the term given to the activity that occurs when tourists travel', and Middleton (1993, p. 7) says it 'is deemed to include any activity concerned with the temporary short-term movement of people to destinations outside the places where they normally live and work, and their activities during the stay at these destinations'. Based on these definitions, and the fact that the suffix -ism is defined as 'an action or process' (Theobald, 1994), it can be concluded that tourism includes an activity.

Eco originates from the word ecology, an ecological tourism (Hetzer, 1965), and is the prefix that determines the tourism form ecotourism. According to the Collins English Dictionary ecology is 'the study of the relationships between living organisms and their environment; the set of relationships of a particular organism with its environment'

Table 3. Actors engaged in ecotourism (X = stressed by the author/authors)

Actors	Authors							
	Cater, 1994.	Sisman, 1994	Boers and Bosch, 1994	Green, 1995	Allcock <i>et al.</i> 1993	Hvenegaard, 1994	Eagles, 1992	EC, 1994
Tourists	X		X		X	X	X	X
Tour operators			X	X		X		X
Tourism business		X		X	X		X	X
Tourism organisations	X		X		X			X
Authorities			X	X	X	X		X
Local people	X		X			X		X
Nature	X						X	X
Media								
Environmental groups		X			X			
Trade unions/ politicians					X	X		
Planners					X	X		
Universities					X	X		
Financial institutions					X			

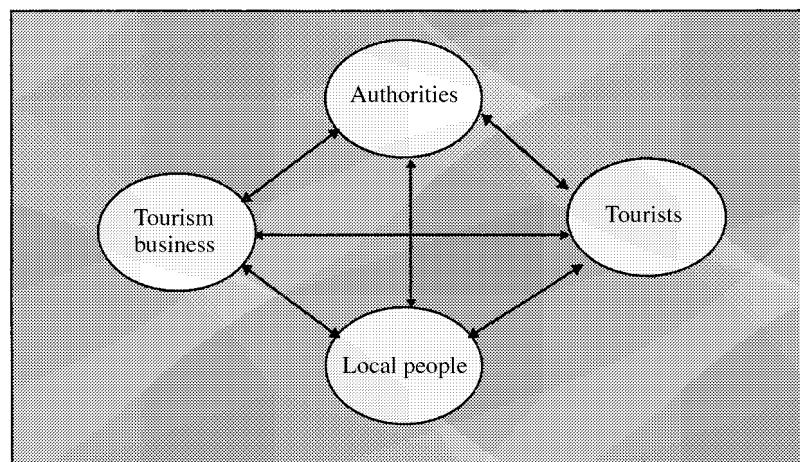


Figure 1. The central actors in ecotourism

(Hanks *et al.*, 1981). What seems to be a central dimension is relationship or co-operation, an aspect not found in any definition of ecotourism.

The definitions presented in this article show that ecotourism has to support local development and ecotourists need to behave in a non-destructive way. The central question is which actors have to co-operate and what relationships are essential? Moore and Carter (1993) stress co-ordination between two actors, resource managers and tour operators. Wallace and Pierce (1996, p. 870) studied ecotourism in Brazil (Amazon Basin) and came to the conclusion that 'cooperation between IBAMA, EMAMTUR, EMBRATUR, FVA, other Governmental agencies and NGOs, and the commercial sector will be essential'. IBAMA = The Brazilian Institute for Environment and Renewable Natural Resources, EMAMTUR = The state of Amazonas Tourist Board, FVA = Fundação Vitória Amazônica (Wallace and Pierce, 1996). Case studies from different parts of the world support the idea of close co-operation between different actors. Koscak (1998) studied rural tourism development in Slovenia and concluded that actors at both national and local levels have to be involved. The importance of an active tourist board is pointed out by Owen *et al.* (1993), who studied sustainable tourism development in Wales. A sustainable tourism development project must be community-led and the importance of resident participation that Long (1993) found

when studying ecotourism development in Punta Lagu (Mexico) is supported by Brown and Essex (1997), who studied the development of the Cape Byron Headland Reserve in New South Wales, Australia. The number of actors involved in tourism development varies from one area to another. Some of the actors involved in ecotourism are listed in Table 3.

Although different authors have different views of the actors, who have to co-operate in a tourism development process (see Table 3), there is a quite homogeneous view as to which are the most essential. The following groups of actors have to co-operate: the tourists, the tourism companies (the tourism industry), the authorities, and the local people. The idea that there are four main groups of actors who have to co-operate can also be found in the magic pentagon of sustainable development presented by Müller (Finnish Tourist Board, 1995), and in the integrated conceptual framework for ecotourism phenomena developed by Hvenegaard (1994). A simple framework showing the groups of actors that have to co-operate can be found in Figure 1, which also shows the complexity of the relations between the actors.

Based on previously presented definitions of ecotourism (Table 1), the framework presented in Figure 1, and the basic premise of ecology, ecotourism can be defined as:

an activity where the authorities, the tourism industry, tourists and local people

co-operate to make it possible for tourists to travel to genuine areas in order to admire, study and enjoy nature and culture in a way that does not exploit the resource, but contributes to sustainable development.

Ecotourism is not adventure tourism or nature tourism, but a much more demanding form of tourism. (Adventure tourism = 'leisure activity that takes place in an unusual, exotic, remote or wilderness destination and tends to be associated with high levels of activity by the participants, most of it outdoors. Adventure travellers expect to experience varying degrees of risk, excitement and tranquillity and to be personally tested or stretched in some way' (Scace, 1993, p. 63). Nature tourism is tourism in natural areas with a focus on experiences of nature-based products (Hemmi, 1995; Valkama, 1997).) All parties involved in ecotourism have to co-operate, focus on sustainability (Hunter, 1995), and stress the educational dimension (Ceballos-Lascuráin, 1993a). The ecotourist has to accept the standard of living offered at the resort, adapt to the local traditions and be willing to learn and submit to restrictions. A 'win-win-win' strategy has to be accepted among the actors in a tourist area (Elkington, 1994). The environment, the companies and the tourists must benefit from tourism, not forgetting the host community, which must be involved from the beginning of the development process. An ecotourist should not interfere with natural development and exploit resources. In adventure and nature tourism, as well as in ecotourism, nature is in focus and all these three tourism forms are nature-based. The difference between ecotourism on the one hand and nature and adventure tourism on the other is that ecotourism by definition has a built in sustainable dimension and a multi-focus approach. All actors involved have to benefit in the long run. (One major difference between nature tourism and adventure tourism is that an adventurer is seeking excitement and does not fear dangerous situations, while a nature tourist is satisfied with the scenic environment (Pihlström, 1993).) Ecotourism is a sustainable and specific tourism form. Sustainable tourism, on the other hand, consists of principles that all

tourism forms should adapt to. The importance of taking the unique characteristics of a tourism area into account when developing sustainable tourism is stressed by Hunter (1997) when he presents the adaptive paradigm. Sustainable tourism is a state, a result of a sustainable tourism development, which embraces the following principles: (1) there should be a focus on long-term economic benefits; (2) the development should be sensitive to the needs and aspirations of the host population; (3) it should be on a scale that respects the character of the area; (4) there should be recognition of the intrinsic value of an environment; and (5) there should be a focus on the balance between ecological and economic aspects (Owen *et al.*, 1993).

ECOTOURISM IN FINLAND

Ecotourism has been discussed in Finland since the beginning of the 1990s and the way the concept has been defined and interpreted seems to reflect the general view found in the more international arena. The aim of this section is to convey a picture of the ecotourism discussion in Finland and to show the importance of developing a mutual understanding, not least from a marketing point of view.

Ecotourism in Finland at the beginning of the 1990s was not accepted as it was equated with nature tourism and discussed mainly on an operational level. The view of the relationships between nature tourism and the ecotourism that Boo (1990, p. 2) presents in her book *Ecotourism: the Potentials and Pitfalls* was very influential in the ecotourism discussion in Finland. She defined nature tourism in the same way as Ceballos-Lascuráin (1987) defined ecotourism, and ecotourism was consequently equated with nature tourism, a tourism that is nature-based (Katila, 1993). The content of the concept ecotourism was not specified, and staying at a cottage, or renting a farm in the countryside in Finland therefore could also be regarded as ecotourism (Hautala, 1992). One of the larger setbacks in the development of ecotourism in Finland was when the Finnish Tourist Board claimed in an official tourism policy brochure that ecotourism destroys the areas that tourists visit (CTF, 1993). They claim that the concept of sustain-

able tourism should be used (Pihlström *et al.*, 1995). The reason for this opinion can be derived from different areas. Pihlström (1993) for example is doubtful whether ecotourism is suitable in Finland, because of the lack of appropriate areas for ecotourism. Instead, nature tourism, defined broadly as 'tourism in natural nature areas' (Hemmi, 1995), should be developed. Even the right of public access may cause development problems (Steele, 1995), because this limits the possibility of charging entrance fees for tourists, who visit Finnish nature areas (Katila, 1993). (There are 30 national parks and 19 nature parks in Finland (Haapanen, 1994; Statistical Yearbook of Finland, 1996).) The misinterpretation of the concept of ecotourism can also be one reason for the rejection of the concept from use in Finland. Lampén (1994), for example, states that, if ecotourism is tourism in undisturbed areas without considering the consequences, then sustainable tourism is a more proper concept to use. There was also an imbalance between theoretical discussions and efforts aiming at developing practical guidelines, where the latter outweighs the former.

How to run tourism companies in accordance with the principles of sustainable business has gained much attention during the whole of the 1990s. Hentinen (1993) and Seppälä (1993), for example, focused on areas such as water and energy consumption, waste disposal problems, and the importance of well-informed actors on the tourism market and proper management. Sustainable tourism development in Finland has been supported by two larger projects. The first project started in 1994 and ended in 1995 (Pihlström *et al.*, 1995). Ten tourism companies were studied and operational guidelines on how to turn traditional tourism companies into more sustainable ones were developed. A follow-up study was carried out in 1996, and the purpose of this second project was to study how ISO14001 (International Standards for Environment Management) and EMAS (ECO - Management and Audit Scheme) could be implemented in different types of Finnish tourism companies (Pihlström *et al.*, 1997).

The theoretical discussion of ecotourism in Finland in the late 1990s has increased somewhat and there are two books especially that

can be highlighted. The first one consists of nine articles all focusing on sustainable tourism (Borg *et al.*, 1997). Ecotourism is not discussed explicitly in this book, but sustainable tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism, and countryside tourism are elucidated. The second book is about ecotourism in Finland. Björk (1997) studied what Finnish tourists and travel agencies know about ecotourism, how much tourists value ecotourism, and which sustainable principles have been introduced by the lodging industry.

The diverse interpretation of ecotourism is obstructing its development and marketing processes. Marketing is to give and keep promises (Bitner, 1995) and Wight (1993) clearly shows how important it is to use the right concept in marketing. To market ecotourism to Finnish consumers should not cause any larger problems because of the consumers' low knowledge level of what ecotourism stands for. Björk (1997) surveyed Finnish tourists and his results show that when the tourists' task was to pick out the right characteristics from a presented list, they managed quite well, but when they had to describe ecotourism in their own words, the results were very disappointing. The marketing of ecotourism to international tourists seems to be more demanding. German tourists, for example, have a better knowledge of what ecotourism is (Hentinen, 1993), and there is a risk of misleading marketing because of the mixed view among tourism companies in Finland of what ecotourism stands for (Björk 1996). The promise that the resort is an ecoresort is not kept — the reality does not correspond to expectations — and the result will be dissatisfied tourists.

DISCUSSION

The fastest growing segment of tourism is nature-based tourism, which includes ecotourism (Ceballos-Lascuráin, 1993b). The tourism market is becoming greener and more and more tourists take the green aspects of the resorts into consideration when deciding where to go for a holiday (Finnish Tourist Board, 1995). A study of Finnish hotels shows

that almost all hotels are introducing green management policies. The development is slow, but moving in the right direction. The tour operators are more passive. They are waiting for the market to be active, and for more tourists to demand sustainable alternatives (Björk, 1996).

From a marketing perspective, it is essential that a product is marketed correctly (Wight, 1994). Several definitions of ecotourism have been presented, but all central dimensions in ecotourism have not been stressed. Some of the definitions presented in the literature have been analysed in this paper, an extended definition has been developed and ecotourism has been compared with nature tourism and adventure tourism. Ecotourism have been defined as an activity where the authorities, the tourism industry, tourists and local people co-operate to make it possible for tourists to travel to genuine areas in order to admire, study and enjoy nature and culture in a way that does not exploit the resources, but contributes to sustainable development.

Tourism marketing is image marketing, and the importance of promises cannot be stressed enough (Ryan, 1991). The tourists create mental pictures and expectations partly on what the marketers tell them. What headline a tourism company decides to use when marketing their tourism products matters. Is it nature tourism, adventure tourism or ecotourism – or something else? The promises must be kept (Bitner, 1995; Grönroos, 1996). Ecotourism has, as discussed, a strong focus on the ecological dimension, but it is also important to look at ecotourism from a marketing point of view – from the demand side. Ecotourism cannot be developed and managed to support a sustainable development until it also focuses on tourists and their behaviour, a perspective stressed by Hunter (1995). It is essential to understand how tourists interpret the concept of ecotourism from a marketing perspective. Ecotourism is demanding and expensive, and the risk of unsatisfied tourists is substantial owing to the diverse interpretation of what ecotourism stands for. Strict definitions of different tourism forms are needed. The gap between theory and practice can be wide, and it is essential that a theory is adjusted to the complexity and diversity of the reality. This is

appropriate after a solid theoretical base has been established.

The interest in developing ecotourism has increased during the 1990s and most research has focused on the supply side and how to develop resorts in accordance with the principle of sustainable development (Ayala, 1996; Burch, 1997). An ecotourist resort without tourists cannot be sustainable. Therefore, more research focusing on the demand side would be welcomed. A central question still unresolved is how much are tourists willing to pay for trips that are more sustainable than mass tourism? Although the environment is in focus, we have to keep in mind that even this kind of tourism must be based on profit-making activities, and tourists must have the opportunity to enjoy their stay (D' Ayala, 1995; Giannellini, 1993). Another important unresolved question is how much comfort do ecotourists need? Are they willing to pay a higher price for a lower standard, i.e. usually a more authentic reality?

To move fast and be first gives a competitive edge in most industries, including the tourism industry. To manage large tourism projects involving actors from different industries and countries is difficult and demanding (Mill, 1990). The development of tourism projects and marketing programmes may thereby have an undesired sluggishness. Finland has the same resource as the other Scandinavian countries – its nature (Nyberg, 1995). To be able to compete with these countries Finland should be leading the development, but a look at current progress shows a development that seems to be too slow. Finland is also competing with countries such as Ireland, Russia and Canada in a larger perspective, and of these countries, Canada has a well developed ecotourism programme, Ireland has unique natural resources and Russia has huge development potential (Bowes, 1993; Suomen luonto, 1996). What is needed to be competitive are strict definitions of the different forms of tourism, out of which suitable principles, guidelines and regulations can be developed (Wallace and Pierce, 1996), as well as a business environment that enhances co-operation and the development of complete tourism packages of interest to both domestic and international tourists.

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