

### 0. Abstract.

Ecotourism theoretically consists of responsible travel to natural areas that confers environmental and social benefits. Despite those positive aims, there has been a scholar emphasis on the uneven results of ecotourism development, highlighting the gaps between its promised and observed outcomes. A growing number of academics assigns those failures to the capitalist nature of ecotourism and its role in sustaining neoliberalism expansion. They are calling for more research on this relationship, which this study is concerned with. The aim of the present paper is to understand and identify mechanisms preventing a fair and even application of ecotourism principles. In order to do so, cross-case study search for pattern methodology has been chosen, helping to assess ecotourism development in different contexts and scales as to identify common obstacles to the achievement of positive outcomes. The results accordingly allocate some of the negative impacts of ecotourism implementation to its intertwinement with neoliberal policies and practices, which triggers the following mechanisms: extension of neoliberal governance to the detriment of local population self-determination, modification of local culture towards market-driven logics and increased neoliberalization of nature under the form of commodification. In turn, those mechanisms ensue the studied negative social, political and environmental effects. To reduce those, locals should be empowered towards the decision to enter ecotourism and the way to conduct it, excluding dependency on external actors to avoid neoliberal hegemony. **Keywords:** ecotourism; neoliberal governance; cultural hegemony

### 1. INTRODUCTION.

Ecotourism has grown in popularity to the point of being the most rapidly expanding sector of the tourism industry (Honey, 2008). It is described by The International Ecotourism Society as: “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people and involves interpretation and education” (TIES, 2015). Ecotourism is presented as a solution to the derive of mass tourism as it requires less constructed areas and can focus in beneficiating local communities and enhancing the conservation of natural areas and their biodiversity (Das & Chatterjee, 2015). The United Nation General Assembly, in a 2014 report, emphasizes the role of ecotourism as a tool for poverty eradication and environmental protection (UNGA, 2015), especially in developing countries, and underlines the role of tourism as a strategic sector, inviting international and national financial institutions, as well as the UN system, to invest in ecotourism (UNWTO, 2017). Thus, ecotourism has been heavily promoted in the recent years by a wide range of actors including transnational organizations, financial institutions, national governments, non-governmental organizations, professionals, researchers and is becoming an increasingly popular strategy (Fletcher and Neves, 2012). Thanks to the discourse of its advocates, ecotourism is conventionally understood as a fundamentally positive concept and practice, often linked with conservation purpose by creating natural reserves, going from extraction use to visit use, and educating people to preserve their environment (Ávila-García et al., 2012). It is described as a way to empower local residents, provide them with education, employment and income opportunities while giving guests the chance to educate themselves, reconnect with nature and discover new cultures (UNWTO, 2017). As such, discourse analysis of ecotourism promotion tends to demonstrate that ecotourism is promoted as panacea to many problems, without revealing much of its potential downsides and thus, is hard to criticize (Duffy, 2015).

However, despite the apparently admirable aims of ecotourism, its application on the field seems to give different results than those claimed (Das & Chatterjee, 2015). As Duffy states, “the promotion of these positive outcomes can mask the complexity of power relations produced by a commitment to ecotourism” (2008, p.2). Many researchers are describing and analyzing effects of ecotourism that are very far from marketed goals and practices, such as environmental depletion, growth in power and socio-economic inequalities, social unrest, lack of local governance and decision power for local population, loss over control of land and resources, just to a cite a few (Ávila-García et al., 2012; Duffy, 2015; León, 2007; Lucas & Kirit, 2009; Fletcher and Neves, 2012; Gascón, 2011; Mowforth and Munt, 2015; Nyaupane et al. 2006). Even cases presented as references of “good practices” by the tourism

industry are criticized by Gascón (2013) and Goodwin & Santilli (2009) as being unstable overtime and possibly leading to unsuccessful development. Thus, there is an urgent need to understand where lies the gap between the marketed goals and the reality of ecotourism as to rectify its outcomes.

Providing elements of explanation, many scholars have led a debate around this question and they tend to similar findings i.e. the uneven results of ecotourism are linked with its nature as a key-driver of capitalism and its intertwinement with neoliberal practices and policies (Ávila-García et al., 2012; Cañada, 2010; Duffy, 2006, 2008, 2015; Fletcher & Neves, 2012; Gascón, 2011, 2013; Hof & Blázquez-Salom, 2015; Mowforth & Munt, 2015; Rytteri & Puhakka, 2012; Van Noorloos, 2011). The expansion through ecotourism of the implicit (or explicit) endorsement of the objectives and means of neoliberalism, that Fletcher calls manifold capitalist fix (2016), makes the need for critical assessment even more crucial. Critical researchers have been able to identify several mechanisms by which ecotourism expand neoliberal logics, creating inequalities and uneven development. Such mechanisms can include neoliberalization of nature, accumulation by dispossession, environmentalism of the rich, and many others (Ávila-García et al., 2012), which are often the result of politicized human activities (Maguigad et al., 2015; Fletcher, 2016).

## 2. OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT.

How can the marketed goals and the observed results of ecotourism be so far from one another? Considering the size and expansion of this touristic sector, the previous question requires an urgent answer if negative impacts are to be mitigated. This is what this paper is concerned with: understanding the mechanisms that hinder the application of the ecotourism principles. Identification of patterns repeated through different geographical contexts and scales of ecotourism development, will contribute, in the continuity of the critical debate, to the unpacking of conceptual and factual blind spots about ecotourism and to a possible reduction of its negative effects

## 3. METHODOLOGY AND WORK PLAN.

Beeton underlines the usefulness of case study research in tourism through the features that it “can illustrate the complexities of a situation by recognizing more than [sic] one contributing factor” (2005, p.38). More importantly, it allows for holistic inductive comprehension through an insider’s perspective. This is especially relevant to the present study methodology, which is using the inductive function of case studies to determinate the cause of observed consequences in ecotourism. However, case studies are context specific and the extraction of patterns requires identifying a tendency independent of particular context. The chosen methodology, cross case study search for pattern, helps alleviate the risk of reaching premature conclusion by looking at data in divergent ways (Eisenhart, 1989), and answer Castree’s critique (2008b) about the need for studies in ecotourism to go beyond the specific context.

With the aim of presenting diverse cases but maintaining the depth of analysis, a total of four cases<sup>1</sup> have been selected throughout the literature review (which double function is to summarize the actual debate and compile case studies to choose from), according to the following criteria: authors diversity, geographical diversity, scale diversity, community involvement and decision power diversity, indicators of social and environmental changes. In line with the qualitative methodology of analysis induction, the extraction of pattern will be undertaken by going from materials to ideas and back, identifying codes, categories and their content (Crang in Hay, 2005). Those categories and their relationships are the patterns that are extracted and discussed as final results.

## 4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS.

**Neoliberal governance – who’s interests are served?**

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<sup>1</sup> See references in bold in 6. Bibliographic References.

To start with it is important to note that, according to Bramwell and Lane (2011), the concept of governance can should help to achieve the goals of sustainable tourism, enhancing the democratic process and the achievement of social, environmental and economic objectives within the destination. However this has not been the fact for the different ecotourism developments evaluated. Indeed, the results encountered are closer to those of Moscardo (in Bramwell and Lane 2011), who describes residents to have the most limited role in destination governance.

Within all case studies evaluated and despite the different scales represented, the impulse to enter ecotourism has never been the one of the population of the future destination. Once introduced and promoted by external agents, ecotourism through its multiple promises may create some enthusiasm within local population, but do not emerge as a response to its expressed desires. Looking at all cases, it appears that suggestions or decisions to enter ecotourism for an area or a country came from government (regionally or nationally) and are linked to an alignment with capitalist ideology of economic growth, as all projects are presented as economic strategies to attract capital. Moreover, a growing compliance to market-driven strategies and policies associated to neoliberal expansion was also identified in all contexts (but differently articulated of course) and supported by different transitional actors such as IFIs, NGOs, private sector, etc. This is consistent with the findings of Braudel, according to whom transitions to capitalist development is due to the state stance (in Harvey, 2003, p.74). Some of the mechanisms used in the different contexts to extend the power of the markets can be put in relation with those identified by Castree's (2008a). Examples of *reregulation* have been encountered within all cases as well as those of *marketization* and *flanking mechanisms*. Those mechanisms are used to ascertain, socially, the "(re)negotiation of the boundaries between the market, the state and the civil society" (p.143), confirming neoliberalism as a social project to be expanded to all part of the society.

If the first reason to implement a project is economic, advocates of ecotourism do not forget to put forward the other effects it should bring: a mean to provide income for inhabitants or nature conservation, in line with the "win-win" ecotourism script. This is consistent with the description of ecotourism as preferred strategy of development (Gascón, 2013), as it helps leverage more than one economic sector of the society (and thus increases return on investment) while securing its position as a flanking mechanism aimed at redressing externalities (social and environmental inequalities) of the capitalist system. Hence, ecotourism strengthens the role of firms (via corporate social responsibility, between others) and the private sectors in general to manage their own externalities. Those results seem to be in line with those of Horowitz (2015) who presents flanking mechanisms (CSR especially) as means to ensure a socio-politic context favorable to capitalist development, empowering firm over state as key agent of social welfare. Ecotourism is popular within the demand and the supply side and is heavily promoted by international development planners, which has led it to become an overall increasingly chosen strategy (Fletcher, 2011), even if it does not fit local context. As it is a non-traditional activity in most destinations, ecotourism introduction will increase the role played by external agents, accentuating the loss of control from the locals. Local control is however the most crucial concept in relation with tourism development if people's rights are to be respected (International Survival, in Mowforth & Munt, 2015).

Ecotourism is often introduced in pristine or remote places (Honey, 2008), which had until now only few contacts with the tourism industry before and relied on other type of subsistence (Gascón, 2013). For locals, tourism is not a traditional activity, thus they don't have any mechanisms in place to manage it nor the unrest it can provoke (Morais et al., 2006). It lacks pertinence to create community empowerment through an activity that is sometimes not even known by the population, when often ecotourism replaces an activity locals were skilled about and that could have beneficiated from more support. The introduction of ecotourism is often subsequent to the cessation of a traditional activity and serving the interests of locals, more attention should be brought to their skills and wishes than to what

could potentially deliver greater forms of capital accumulation. The problem lies in the fact that, often locals are ignorant and inexperienced about the operations of tourism (Gascón 2013), leading them to be dependent of external agents from the very start of the project, which is exemplified through the cases. Locals clearly express their fear and reluctance to engage with tourists, underlining their lack of language knowledge and skills to provide tourism services. The lack of knowledge/training/self-confidence/motivation to introduce ecotourism on their own term is clearly a crucial draw-back on the introduction of ecotourism as a mean for social justice, as it hinder the possibility of self-management of the activity and create a relation of dependency with external agents. This dependency relation is very problematic in the respect of the principles of ecotourism, such as self-governance, community involvement, empowerment and control, etc. and might explain why ecotourism is so often the chosen strategy: it helps others people than the locals to achieve their own agenda (Fletcher, 2016). Despite the various degree of community participation explored, none of the results provided a solution where the locals where truly in charge of the design of the new economic activity. It is in the end external agents (belonging to NGOs, private companies, governmental support, etc.) who carried the implementation and designed the ecotourism project. Hence, it was identified that form of community participation in ecotourism planning and management was often a tokenistic, flawed process and the participation model recognized as ethnocentric when dealing with developing economies. This is contradictory with the marketed goals of ecotourism as a community empowerment and driver of local governance. Unfortunately, those results resemble political signs of disempowerment identified by Scheyvens (1999).

In addition of resulting in a loss of control from the local population over the activities hold on their territory, the introduction of ecotourism also results in a socio-economic differentiation within the local population that can bring source of conflict. As seen, ecotourism projects introduce dependency on external help and investment. The ecotourism model will thus be implemented according to the norms of those external agents, which will not fail to serve their own interests in the process. As the community often does not possess enough capital to invest in ecotourism, it is dependent from external investments to introduce tourism infrastructure. However, those who will choose to invest instead of the locals will not do so without benefits at key. So, it is quite naturally that all cases reported high leakage of the tourism industry, allowing locals to collect but very few if not none of the economic benefits leveraged in the area. Those who implemented it (external agents) capture most of the incomes created. Monopolies from the tourism industry (such as national or international tour operators) are described by the population as well as their own exclusion from the economic activity. Locals also complained about the repartition of the profits made from the tourism within the population, which benefit those who already possessed socio-economic advantages, and thus were able to take part in the tourism industry from the start to the detriment of the poorer or more discriminated part of the population. Indeed, those within the population who adapted quickly (or had enough money to invest) to the new market-driven model received more benefits of the ecotourism activity. The disadvantaged claim the competition is unfair, as they have only few or no investments to bring into ecotourism and do not know how to handle it, leading any tourism initiative coming from a community to have less chance of being successful compared to external initiatives based on experience and knowledge of external market. Income opportunities are few and unfair, so they create tensions and disillusion within the society. This is in accordance with the economic and psychological signs of disempowerment identified by Scheyvens (1999)

Surprisingly, if generally put forward and used as an argument when discussing the implementation of ecotourism project, the employment generated by the different projects is barely described in the different cases. Is it because only few jobs were created, or because their nature can not be claimed as positive impact? This second proposition relates to the findings of Cañada (2010), whose work describes the loss of employment within traditional sectors, replaced with low pay, low skills jobs from the tourism industry that include seasonality, insecurity, low incomes and gender discrimination towards

women who are being employed for their same tasks they operate at home. León (2007) describes in her work the segregation done in the Dominican Republic's tourism industry in employing younger people who talk more than one language, which can be relayed in the cases to the fact that people with a higher socio-economic position were benefiting more from tourism.

Considering the non-interest in ecotourism, the flawed tourism participation process, the loss of governance and negative outcomes, why is there no resistance from the locals in entering ecotourism? The answer is, when there is resistance, it is unsuccessful faced to the power held by advocates of ecotourism. As described in Polany's argument (in Castree, 2008a), introduction of market-based mechanism creates resistance. The resistance might not appear at once, because the extent of the changes that neoliberalization through ecotourism will induce are not fully internalized yet by the populations it touched. Nonetheless, once projects are implemented, different phenomena of shift of power, re-shaping social relations and uneven benefits distribution achieve to provoke unrest and frustration within the society, leading part of it to resist.

In a context of neoliberal extension, market-driven strategies are preferred as they can leverage profits much faster and on a bigger scale than locally-developed and promoted ecotourism. Connecting with transnational networks, external agents are faster in designing a viable product adapted to wealthy customers that will provide income in the short term. External agents are thus encouraged by government to take part in ecotourism and are rising in importance quickly, channeling to them authority support, gaining power and influence. Local population does not receive the necessary support (or lesser pressure) to conduct ecotourism in a difficult neoliberal context focused on short term profits, as it would require a lot of time to allow for a strong sustainability project to be set up. The best practices require community total involvement and participation using cohesion and cooperation to aim at slow growth, small scale projects that would help preserve unique characteristics of culture and environment (Morais et al., 2006). Successful ecotourism projects should achieve maximum level of community control and benefits (Nault & Stapleton, 2011), which is not represented throughout the case studies. Still, local destinations are pushed towards ecotourism anyway, leading them to be dependent on external agents that will design policies and participation models benefiting their own economic interests to the disadvantage of the local population. Indeed, social and environmental benefits are far from being the first or only concern in the implementation of ecotourism projects, and the evaluation of the outcomes seems to take more into account the general level of economic transaction generated than what part of it has been beneficial to local population

### **Cultural neoliberalization - the neoliberal hegemony**

As a new activity is introduced, new dynamics are created within the host community as to whom will tend to it and who might receive its benefits, leading to unavoidable changes in the social and cultural background. In most cases, community organization was closely linked to traditional activities, in majority agricultural, and demonstrated a high level of solidarity. The introduction of tourism generated in all case studies conflicts and unrest within the local population, often regarding the increase in socio-economic differentiation and shifts in power induced by the new activity. This is consistent with Bakker (2010), findings about the necessarily uneven results of neoliberalization. In the case studies, those who benefited most from the income generated by tourism within the host community were those with enough resources to invest into tourism and flexible enough to adapt to the market-driven scheme. Those findings are in line with those of Li (2010), who notes that part of the population will comply with the new market-driven scheme as they are attracted by economic advantages, generating conflict with those who do not accept it and would like to preserve their traditional mechanisms. The case studies also show that when neoliberal logic is introduced within a non-market place (under the form of marketization of the environment or the culture for example), it provokes resistance, in line with Polany's arguments (in Castree, 2008). According to Horowitz results, when neoliberal hegemony,

grounded in capitalist culture, intersects with counter-hegemonic forces, the latter are overcome through development of strategies articulated around local contexts (2015, p.98). The case study written by Rittary and Puhakka (2012) is a good example of how actors advocating fewer regulations and free markets manage to re-regulate the laws in accordance to their monetary interests, shaping the political context to their economic vision against groups defending the interests of society and environment. As it reshapes the community organization and power structure, neoliberalism logic extension can be related to neo colonialism (Mowforth and Munt, 2015): it also modify people tastes, thoughts and acts, governing more areas of their life from an economic logic. The case study written by Gascón (2013) exemplifies how a community once based on solidarity and cohesion has come to tear each other apart because the new economic activity (ecotourism) had reshaped the way people share and define property rights, making them individual profits oriented instead of community welfare oriented. Expandingly, community based life-style is being replaced with market driven strategies. Going back to the relation of dependency on external agents, it can thus be said that it create neoliberal hegemony, extending and deepening neoliberal governance as a necessary social and cultural project. Indeed, in order to be hosts of ecotourists, locals are supposed to learn and adapt to the tastes of "the demand", their future customers. Instead of opening their culture as it is to curious visitors, economically successful projects of ecotourism seem to require a lot of investment and structural changes as to provide high-end accommodation, cooking adapted to tastes of visitors, expected service, etc. External agents assist in adapting typical and culturally rich experiences into marketable products fitting the tastes of another culture (often western) or simply representing those of the biggest market share. It is a form of cultural hegemony, the appliance of the western constructs as the undisputed normative basis to build upon, which has been suggested by Cater (2006). It forces destinations entering tourism to reshape their territory, their economy, their cultural production to fit the wishes of external actors in hope of getting some financial return rather than their own direct interests. In some cases, locals are passively been looked upon as they can not interact with tourists because they speak only their native language, creating an increased dependency on external agents to act as facilitators of cultural exchange. In other cases, locals need to actively demonstrate certain aspects of their culture (dances, songs, customs, etc.) to satisfy their visitors, modifying the rhythm they would traditionally perform those. The need for locals to change their customs and rise their hosting standards, stressed out by the tourism industry, can be understood as a form of gentrification, changing a traditional use of territory serving the benefits of its population to a use based on the compliance with external agents' culture and richer tourists' desires. Considering Bakker's typology of socio-nature neoliberalization, the previously described effect (the introduction of market-driven logics into traditional society resulting in negative social outcomes but positive monetary income) can be established as a "social fix", in the way that it produces "a social degradation as a source of profit" (2010, p.724).

Most of the time, culture of locals is presented by outside agents (often from outgoing travel agencies) who select the most marketable traits, reshaping the understanding of visitors about the local culture, leading to misinterpretation. In the facts, the very culture of residents is being marketed and sold as an experience. This might be put in relation with the results of Hale (2002), who explained that only a minimal part of the local culture is recognized (as here only some marketable traits) and the rest rejected: what can be used as a source of income is taken into consideration, and what might not produce benefits is neglected.

As explained, spreading ecotourism allow neoliberalism to extend its reach into pristine areas and non-capitalist societies. Neoliberalism is necessarily a social project, as to survive it has to convert individuals and societies to its logic until it becomes embodied to the way people think and act (Harvey, 2007). If Mowforth and Munt (2015) describes is as neo colonialism, Higham (2007) prefers to call it imperialism. In both cases, the arguments are profits, the reality is uneven distribution of those and an increased global governance including neoliberal hegemony.

**Neoliberalization of nature – a necessarily environmental project**

Neoliberalism can also be considered as a necessarily environmental project. Indeed, all case studies confirm environmental changes following the introduction of ecotourism and the expansion of market-driven logics. Nature is managed as a business, a potential source of income that should be turned into an effective one, being from a governmental or external agents perspective. Even locals have modified the way they interact with nature. Ecotourism is depicted as the mean to turn “sleeping” assets into effective prosperity. This has been achieved either by selling the destination as a remote natural area where to witness the peace and beauty of the surroundings, selling excursions to the nature, or by introducing a protected area that should be paid for to enter. In order to achieve all those, tourism organizations had first to guarantee their access and rights to nature over other conflicting uses, such as agricultural ones, residential ones, etc. The phenomenon is known from the social debate under the term “neoliberalization of nature”, which tends to commodify it under different forms, and works along the four logics identified by Castree (2008) that extend free market-driven logics into non-human world. Indeed, in the cases, illustration of some of the environmental fixes depicted by Castree can be encountered. The first fix for instance, allowing the resorption of economy-environment contradictions by bringing non-human world more fully into capital accumulation, is present in all case studies, even if the fix is clearer when protected areas are designated. In smaller scale ecotourism, natural areas were also presented as a source of potential benefit through non-consumption use if only it could be sold together with an experience to those who possess financial power. The marketization of non-human nature with a disguise of environmental conservation is also named free-market environmentalism and contributes to render invisible the negative effects of neoliberalization of nature through ecotourism (Duffy, 2015). The fourth environmental fix is very clear in the case written by Duffy (2008) as it is non-state agents that write the new national environmental policies. Across cases studies, the observed abusive use of previously non-visited part of the natural areas including soil erosion, littering or degradation of flora is in relation with the fact that ecotourism means the introduction of people within a pristine area, which relates to the second environmental fix: nature is a mean for capital accumulation, period. This underlines perfectly the intrinsic contradictions of the ecotourism script, which pretends to safeguard nature but at the same time introduce and heavily market its use, might it be in a non-extracting way, leading to some environmental depletion.

In the same vein of contradiction, ecotourism proposes to realize social advantages and protect nature in the same time. However, some of the cases studied describe clearly that the introduction of natural protected area aimed at tourism use results in many social disadvantages. The conservation and introduction of the tourism activities are thought along profits-driven guidelines and take few insights into the reality of communities having a use of the previously state-owned or non-owned area. The introduction of protected areas means for some locals the exclusion of their ancestral territory, where were conducted the activities of subsistence and does not, in many cases, provide them with a compensatory activity or income. “Accumulation by dispossession” is the name that Harvey (2003) has given to the way of creating capital accumulation outside of the system of economic production mainly by dispossessing public assets and rights to the advantage of capitalists

**5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The literature review has covered a scholar debate, which indicates that the uneven results of tourism development, including negative social and environmental impacts, could be linked to the neoliberal nature of tourism management and context. Going through four case studies from different world regions, this research has confirmed those findings and associated mechanisms have been discussed.

One important aspect of ecotourism principle is its role to sustain population empowerment and self-determination (Higham, 2007). However, it was noted that in the cases, a shift of power occurred within the local population in favor of its wealthier members or external agents, who appeared to receive most of the ecotourism economic benefits and who gained in influence over policy design and control of the

activity. The market-based mechanisms embodied in ecotourism implementation make it an activity that cannot be implemented on the own terms of the local population by lack of knowledge and thus, results in a dependency on external actors, which increases local and global neoliberal governance. Moreover, it was exemplified in the case studies that the negative social aspects reported, such as loss of social cohesion and traits of culture, growing unrest, tensions, and socio-economic differentiation as well as population displacement, can be put in relation with the introduction of ecotourism and the associated neoliberal hegemony mechanism. Environmental impacts can also be linked to the introduction of market-driven process through ecotourism, leading nature to be increasingly managed as a business, as a source of income rather than as a co-constitution of humanity that needs a non-anthropocentric agency for effective ecological preservation (Bakker, 2010).

Managerial implications of the findings include different aspects. Firstly, ecotourism implementation should only be considered on the expressed wishes of the population, and more information should be provided on its potential negative effects to balance the overwhelming advocacy it benefits from. If the locals choose to implement ecotourism, as few as possible indications should be given on the design of the ecotourism implementation and management program, as it should be undertaken on their own term, in a democratic and cohesive way that corresponds to their perception of hospitality. If external investments are needed for the project, they should come from institutions that will not expect or put pressure regarding volume and timing of return on investment, as ecotourism should be a slow growth, small scale project (Morais et al., 2006), aimed at social and environmental benefits in priority. Large scale promotion of the new destination should not be conducted, as to allow an organic, sustainable growth of the project and avoid reliance on external actors. In addition, the tourists taking part in ecotourism should be ready to experiment lifestyle the same way locals do, without expecting better accommodations than those of the villagers nor food from their origin country, thus allowing empowerment of the locals and improving cultural immersion. Travelling without booking excursions nor accommodation in advance through international tourism companies allow tourists to better spread their money once in the destination and beneficiate directly the local population. In order to reduce general environmental impacts, short and long-distance travels should be conducted without air transport, preferably using public transports. If natural protected areas must be designed, it should be through active collaboration with locals, encompassing different land use, as to safeguard their livelihood.

As exemplified, ecotourism still poses threats to natural area and community welfare, which is contradictory with its very definition. Those findings, which are in line with those of similar studies, highlight the importance of rethinking the ecotourism scheme, and tourism in general, as ecotourism theoretically bears fewer impacts than tourism. Ecotourism as a neo colonialism should not be sustained and transition towards more respectful and strongly sustainable forms of tourism should be initiated. There is room for improvement and it comprises understanding well where the problems come from, which was the aim of this study, and how to solve it, which future studies can help achieve. Hence, from the academic perspective, further research should be conducted on how to mitigate the negative effects of ecotourism despite its neoliberal context and make it an effective tool for social and environmental justice.

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