Values of Ecotourism in an Urban Setting: Hong Kong

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Background – academic

• The agenda of ecotourism in western countries covered beyond the tourism sector

• In Hong Kong, the discussion was about…
  – The resources and their sustainability (Mckercher & Fu, 2006)
  – The marketability in relation to destination management (Mckercher & Chan, 2002)
  – The business opportunity (Chan et al., 2008)

• Limited research concerning the broader goals and aspirations of ecotourism from a
Background – industry

• Hong Kong has achieved only limited success in ecotourism development in terms of business potential and increasing tourist arrivals (McKercher & Chan, 2002; McKercher & Fu, 2006; Chan et al., 2008)

• However, the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) is still promoting this niche sector aggressively (HKTB, 2010)
Objectives

- To identify the values of ecotourism in Hong Kong – from a broader perspective
- To identify the possible mode of developing ecotourism in Hong Kong
Literature Review – Value for community

• The true value of ecotourism could relate to economic, environmental, societal and cultural issues in a community \( (\text{Pickering et al., 2007}) \)
  – A broader conservation strategy \( (\text{Stem et al., 2003}) \)
  – Not only environmental functions, but also cultural and social functions such as recreational and educational functions \( (\text{Ohe, 2008}) \)
  – Foster transformations in ecological consciousness leading to a sustainable human-environmental relationship \( (\text{Higgins-Desbiolles, 2009}) \)
  – The cause of new values & social relations \( (\text{Stronza, 2007}) \)
Literature Review – Value for industry

- Mass tourism market could benefit ecotourism by providing a diversified choice in soft ecotourism mode accommodating the ‘green’ trend
- Ecotourism also benefited from the mass market through its supply of a large number of clientele generating economic of scales amendable to sustainability (Weaver, 2001b)
• Ecotourism generating numerous beneficial impacts for the host communities, tourists and environments  (Weaver, 2001a)
• Ecotourism was related beyond the tourism industry, although the cost and benefit to other sectors remained ambiguous
  – Disproportional benefit distribution among stakeholders in China  (He et al., 2008)
  – Benefits mostly external operators and urban residents, rather than rural residents who were the direct suppliers in Indonesia  (Walpole & Goodwin, 2000)
Literature Review – Promotion

x Barriers for the success of ecotourism business, namely enterprise, agency, host community, and networks (Silva and McDill, 2004)

x Small business owners lack of marketing skill or high cost of advertising

✔ Montreal’s geo-tourism: Utilizing government funding to develop website with interactive map guide and podcasting made (Verner et al., 2009)

✔ Internet has proven to be a popular information source for ecotourists
Methodology

• Qualitative approach
• Relevant literatures were reviewed
• Non-structured questionnaire was developed
  – 1st section: current development of ecotourism in Hong Kong, with a particular focus on the community involvement in ecotourism activities
  – 2nd section: broader benefits of ecotourism beyond the tourism industry, and possible business model of ecotourism service provider
• Interviews conducted in Sep/Oct-2010
# Profile of interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Primary role</th>
<th>Additional role</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Mr. S.M. Chan</td>
<td>Eco-tour destination scenery photographer</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Mr. K. Chung</td>
<td>Public relations expert in the tourism field</td>
<td>Ecotourism association organizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Mr. L. Cheung</td>
<td>Lecturer at academic institution</td>
<td>Ecotourism course trainer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Ms. Q. Wong</td>
<td>Eco-tour operator</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Mr. E. Cheuk</td>
<td>Freelance reporter and editor of tourism trade publications</td>
<td>Research student majoring in tourism</td>
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Findings – Recent ecotourism development

• Two major types of clienteles: domestic tourists and inbound tourists
• Domestic market has rejuvenated recently because of the establishment of geo-parks
  – Some travellers with keen interest to learn more
  – Most considered geo-park tours as sightseeing
• Geo-tourism could be major attraction in future
• Some guides take-up professional development
Findings – Ecotourism in relation to domestic tourism

• Domestic market was merely surviving

• Activities were mostly for leisure only, and did not bear any education or conservation label

• Some experienced tourists well-coordinated with own arrangement generating limited economic benefits

• Possible negative effects of tourism activities
Findings – Ecotourism in relation to inbound tourism

• Inbound market was still insignificant
• Taiwan, Japan, and Korea: Operators included eco-tours, the number of visitors was still small, but awareness increased. Some individual travelers might stay longer
• Caucasian market: Operators provide eco-tours as an alternative, feedback was encouraging, particularly the cruise travelers to Sai Kung, Luk Keng and Sam Mui Tsai in Tai Po
Findings – Possible business mode

• Number of travellers and business volume were insufficient to support a sizable eco-operator

• Some nature-loving foreigners set up small-scale or even home-based travel agency, with out of genuine love for nature and seeking fun and discovery, but not financial reward

• Promoted on websites and through social marketing channels like facebook and twitter
Findings – Ecotourism beyond tourism industry

- Benefit the overall community
  - Extended stay and spending
  - Positive word-of-mouth about the scenery, travel experience, and destination image
  - Training up school teachers
  - Enhancing students’ awareness towards environmental protection
  - Educating the environmental-friendly citizens
  - NGOs gained support to initiate ecotourism activities or environmental protection projects
  - The benefits to the environment in the long run
Findings – Value of Ecotourism

• The significant economic benefits to the tourism industry were yet to be proven,
• Other aspects should not be underestimated
  – The locals gained better understanding about the natural assets available in the territory
  – Initiate upgrading of eco-guides’ standards
  – Raised awareness in environment protection
  – Temporarily suspension of residential projects at the precious Marine Park - Hoi Ha Wan in Sai Kung
Findings – To be improved

• The urban image was contradictory to the traditional concept of ecotourism destinations
• The short lifecycle of ecotourism products made it detrimental for its development
• HKTB’s promotion was delivered but a minority group of tourists were attached
Conclusion

• Some possible values for HKTB’s investment in eco-tourism promotion in Hong Kong
  – Increased awareness towards the environment and anti-pollution issues
  – Expanded biodiversity as a result of the limitation of destructive development projects
  – Enhancement of environmental conservation programmes
  – Increasing popularity of recreational activities
Conclusion

• Ecotourism should be positioned to supplement the mass tourism activities for inbound tourists, particularly for repeated travelers and well-educated nature lovers.

• Development of ecotourism should not be limited within the tourism industry.

• The existence of such a niche tourism sector would benefit the community as a whole in a progressive pace.
Conclusion

• The value of ecotourism should be studied widely from a macro perspectives
References


References


References


• Moscardo, G. (2008). Sustainable Tourism Innovation:
References


References


• Weaver, D. (2001b). Ecotourism as Mass Tourism: Contradiction or Reality? *Cornell Hotel and
Thank you for your attention
Welcome for comments

Q&A Session