Developing Countries and Tourism Ecolabels

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Developing countries and tourism ecolabels

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Abstract

The provision of ecolabels to environmentally sensitive tourism enterprises is currently being practiced in developed nations in an attempt to protect the natural capital through improvements in existing environmental standards within the industry. The tourism industry in developing countries could soon follow suit by championing the utilization of internationally recognized ecolabeling schemes as a strategy for environmental management, and for setting the course for the environmentally compatible development of the industry. The achievement and promotion of internationally recognized environmental awards would be instrumental to the tourism enterprises of developing countries in marketing their services to high spending, environmentally conscious western tourists. This paper provides a conceptual analysis of the feasibility of adopting ecolabeling schemes for certifying tourism enterprises in developing countries. Key issues and potential barriers that could hinder the ecolabeling process in developing countries are discussed and testable propositions are developed to guide future research for evaluating the effectiveness of tourism ecolabels in developing countries.

Keywords: Tourism ecolabels; Ecolabeling schemes; Ecolabeling process; Developing countries; Environmental impacts; Tourism enterprises; Environmentally compatible tourism

1. Introduction

Ecolabeling schemes, environmental certifications and awards, and environmental quality assurance and evaluation systems are currently being utilized as instrumental tools by the tourism industry in developed nations for protecting the natural environment on which the industry depends (Morgan, 1999), and for setting the course for the environmentally compatible development of the tourism industry. The forward thrust towards certification of tourism enterprises emerged as a result of Agenda 21, approved by 182 countries during the 1992 United Nations Earth Summit (or Rio Summit), which emphasized the need for businesses to comply with environmental regulations and policies to mitigate global environmental problems. While some developing nations are becoming increasingly interested in the adoption of tourism ecolabeling initiatives, there is growing concern that the small-scale, tourism enterprises of developing countries would be ill-equipped to conform to the environmental standards and criteria circumscribed by international ecolabeling schemes originating in developed nations. Oftentimes referred to as the North–South divide, certification standards prescribed by international ecolabeling schemes may be used as protectionist strategies to preserve the business interests of developed countries and their tourism enterprises, thereby exacerbating the North–South divide (Honey & Rome, 2000a). Considering these circumstances, it is important to understand how less well-resourced, developing countries may react to the tourism ecolabeling phenomena which is gaining wide recognition within developed nations. This paper provides a conceptual analysis of the ecolabeling process while examining the feasibility of adopting ecolabeling schemes for certifying tourism enterprises in developing countries. It develops a series of propositions pertaining to: (1) impact assessment phase of the ecolabeling process, (2) criteria development phase of the ecolabeling process, (3) stakeholder involvement in ecolabeling schemes, (4) representation of developing countries in ecolabeling schemes, and (5) potential of ecolabels to educate tourists. The discourse presented in this paper is intended to generate greater awareness regarding the

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concealed hurdles relating to the practicability of tourism ecolabeling schemes for developing countries. Additionally, the developed propositions are expected to guide future research for examining the feasibility and effectiveness of ecolabeling schemes in developing countries.

According to Middleton and Hawkins (1998, p. 240), the tourism industry uses ecolabels (from now on this term will be used interchangeably to mean ecoseals or environmental awards) as "trademarks or logos" to communicate the environmental credentials of a company, with the hopes that customers develop positive attitudes toward their product or service. In the market place, this type of strategy can give companies a differential advantage over their competitors. The use of ecolabels (e.g., Blue Flag, Seaside Award, Green

Table 1
Ecolabeling schemes in the tourism industry[a]

Ecolabeling scheme	Type of awarding agency	Focus area
International		
Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System	NGO	All
Audubon Cooperative Signature Program	NGO	All
Ecofriendly Hotels Worldwide	Private	Facilities (accommodation)
Ecotel	Private	Facilities (accommodation)
Green Globe	Industry Association	All
Regional		
Blue Flag (Europe)	NGO	Facilities (marinas) Location (beaches)
Committed to Green (Europe)	Industry Association	Location (golf courses)
European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (Europe)	NGO	Location (protected areas)
Kleinwalser Valley Environmental Award (Germany and Austria)	Public Authority	Facilities (accommodation)
PATA Green Leaf (Asia Pacific)	Industry Association	All
Tyrolean Environmental Seal of Quality (Austria and Italy)	Public Authority	Facilities (accommodation and catering)
National		
Austrian Ecolabel for Tourism (Austria)	Public Authority	(accommodation and catering)
David Bellamy Award (United Kingdom)	Private Industry Association	Facilities (holiday parks, campsites)
Environmental Squirrel (Germany)	Industry Association	Facilities (accommodation, catering and gas stations)
Gîtes Panda (France)	NGO Industry Association	Facilities (accommodation in parks)
Green Key (Denmark)	NGO Industry Association	Facilities (accommodation)
Green Leaf (Thailand)	Industry Association Public Authority	Facilities (accommodation)
Green Suitcase (Germany)	NGO	Facilities, services and location (accommodation, destinations and tour operators)
NASC (Ireland)	Public Authority	Location (destinations)
National Ecotourism Accreditation Program (Australia)	Industry Association	Facilities, services and location (accommodation, natural attractions and tour operators)
Seaside Award (United Kingdom)	NGO	Location (beaches)
We Are an Environmentally-Friendly Operation (Germany)	Industry Association	Facilities (accommodation and catering)
Sub-national		
Distintivo Ecoturistico (Spain, Alcudia)	Public Authority	Facilities (accommodation)
Ecotur (Spain, Balearic Islands)	Public Authority	Facilities and location (accommodation and destinations)
Green Tourism Business Scheme (United Kingdom, Scotland)	Public Authority	Facilities (accommodation)
ÖKO Grischun (Switzerland, Grabunden)	NGO	Facilities (accommodation and farm food)
ÖKO Tourismuspreis (now merged with national scheme)	Public Authority	Facilities (accommodation)
Scottish Golf Course Wildlife Initiative (United Kingdom, Scotland)	NGO Industry Association Public Authority	Location (golf courses)

[a] Source: Adopted from UNEP (1998, pp. 8–9).

Globe, Blue Angel, Green Leaf, Green Suitcase, etc.) issued by respected accreditation schemes are usually intended to (1) curb tourism's negative environmental impacts on the natural resource base of destination areas by encouraging tourism enterprises to attain high environmental standards (UNEP, 1998), (2) educate tourists regarding the impacts of their tourism-related actions and decisions, thereby prompting them to act in favor of 'environmentally benign' tourism enterprises through their purchasing decisions (UNEP, 1998), and (3) develop standards for environmentally friendly tourism products and services (Mihalic, 2000). Tourism enterprises that earn ecolabels promote their environmental achievements in their marketing campaigns through pamphlets, flyers, brochures, press releases, notice boards, and display of award logos (and flags), both within and off-premises (Morgan, 1999).

Tourism ecolabeling schemes, promoted by both private and public sectors, are currently most prevalent among developed nations at four geopolitical levels—international, regional, national, and sub-national (see Table 1; UNEP, 1998, pp. 8–9). The tourism industry of developing countries may benefit by following suit by championing the utilization of internationally recognized ecolabeling schemes (Mihalic, 2000). The adoption of tourism ecolabels would dovetail with policies relating to natural resource management, environmental conservation and protection, and pollution control while conforming to the concept of environmentally friendly tourism development (Hashimoto, 1999). The ecolabeling concept would be highly appealing to the tourism enterprises of developing countries owing to increasing governmental pressure on the tourism industry to improve environmental performance by adopting effective and tangible environmental management techniques (Zhang, Chong, & Ap, 1999). Furthermore, achievement and promotion of internationally recognized environmental awards would be instrumental to the tourism enterprises of developing countries in marketing their services (UNEP, 1998; Mihalic, 2000) to high spending, environmentally conscious western tourists who are no longer satisfied with the traditional 'sun, sea and sand' type of vacation but engage in holidays that are personally rewarding and environmentally friendly.

2. Tourism development in developing countries and the need for ecolabels

Besides generating foreign exchange earnings and investments, tourism has stimulated economic diversification and job creation in many communities around the globe. Owing to its economically lucrative nature and irrepressible role in nourishing vital economic capillaries, tourism is ostensibly promoted and marketed on a global scale by private and public sectors of the tourist-generating countries as well as host countries. Contrary to these positive impacts, tourism development has, inadvertently, played a precursory role in creating considerable sociocultural and environmental problems at tourist destinations, especially in developing nations. Increased land prices and inflation, high leakage of economic benefits, cultural degradation and acculturation, introduction of exotic species to local flora and fauna, damage to cultural heritage sites, destruction of coral reefs in the Caribbean, disturbance of breeding birds in the Antarctic, pollution through waste and sewage disposal in popular tourist destinations (Erize, 1987; Holder, 1988; Wilkinson, 1989; Brierton, 1991; Cater, 1993; Healy, 1994; Place, 1995; Sirakaya, 1997a; Hall & McArthur, 1998) are just a few examples of tourism's potential for destruction. The detrimental impacts of tourism development in developing countries have been well documented and discussed in the past (De Kadt, 1979, p. 65; Britton, 1982; Mathieson & Wall, 1982; Holder, 1988; Butler, 1990; Sirakaya, 1997a; Akama, 1999; Shackley, 1999; Sindiga, 1999; Sindiga & Kanunah, 1999; Zhang et al., 1999). The incremental inflow of mass tourists from developed countries has further exacerbated the scale, magnitude and intensity of problems (Wheeller, 1997) associated with tourism development in developing countries. Recognizing the natural environment as a vital tourism resource, public and private sectors of the tourism industry are increasingly adopting and implementing environmentally compatible development measures in order to curtail the negative environmental impacts associated with tourism development. Key elements of environmentally sensitive tourism development, in general, include tapping the 'elite', higher spending niche segments of the travel market for low-impact special activity tours, restricting and regulating new development, preserving and protecting areas of outstanding natural beauty and biological diversity and rehabilitating older resorts and destinations (Lockhart, 1997).

Indisputably, tourism development in developing countries has the potential to produce negative environmental impacts, thereby altering the ecological resources of host destinations (Baker, 1997; Obua & Harding, 1997). In light of the quintessential need to maintain the delicate balance between tourism development and the environment in these regions through appropriate planning and management of tourism resources, recommendations for regulating tourism's negative impacts by 'ecolabeling' tourism products are being put forth by concerned parties (Middleton & Hawkins, 1998; UNEP, 1998). In the midst of growing controversy regarding the appropriate interpretation of environmentally compatible (or sustainable) development, the equally ambiguous 'ecolabeling' (environmental labeling)

approach proposed by several private and public sector agencies is being identified as a strategic tool for officially approving and marketing environmentally benign products (Jensen, Christiansen, & Elkington, 1998) while ensuring actions towards a more sustainable future. Within the context of travel and tourism, regulatory authorities and other interested parties seek to promote the design, production, marketing and use of tourism products which have a reduced environmental impact (during their entire life cycle), and furnish tourism consumers with 'better' information on the environmental impacts of tourism products (Middleton & Hawkins, 1998).

Particularly, the 'ecolabeling' approach may be applied to tourism enterprises (businesses or companies) such as hotels/resorts/marinas, travel agencies, tour-operators, ground and water transportation services, and airlines and may also be extended to certify the environmental soundness of tourist destinations and the natural resources at these destinations (UNEP, 1998; Mihalic, 2000). While tourism enterprises of developing countries are predominantly comprised of privately owned, large, internationally franchised chains on one hand, and small-scale entrepreneurial businesses on the other, tourism resources in these countries are largely controlled and operated by the public sector (Zhang et al., 1999). Considering the former, the adoption of tourism ecolabeling schemes in developing countries for the purpose of ensuring environmentally sound management and development of environmentally sensitive tourism would be fraught with impasses (Wildavsky, 1996). Certification efforts of these ecolabeling schemes would be beleaguered by issues such as conflicts of interest among stakeholders (Hemmelskamp & Brockmann, 1997), distrust in scientific accuracy of assessments (Salzhauer, 1991), and industry pressure for relaxation of certification criteria (West, 1995).

3. Ecolabeling schemes for the tourism industry

The unplanned and unanticipated growth of the tourism industry in developing countries catalyzed by burgeoning numbers of tourists to these areas has consequently resulted in the degradation, depletion and, in some cases, total destruction of essential economy-supporting natural resources (Shackley, 1996; Baker, 1997; Obua & Harding, 1997). Tourism industry stakeholders may consider the adoption of 'ecolabeling' ' schemes as a viable option to curb tourism's direct negative (environmental) impacts on the natural resource base of host destinations (UNEP, 1998). Third-party public and private sector tourism industry stakeholders may potentially award 'ecolabels' or 'seals of approvals' to tourism enterprises judged to have fewer impacts on the environment than other similar enterprises. These ecolabels would provide tourists in originating countries (mostly developed) with information regarding the environmental performance of tourism enterprises, thereby enabling them to make informed choices while purchasing products and services from tour-operators, travel agencies, resorts/hotels, and/or other tourism service providers for their vacations (Rhodes & Brown, 1997; Sirakaya, 1997b; Weissman, 1997; Sirakaya & McLellan, 1998; Sirakaya & Uysal, 1998; Sirakaya, Sasidharan, & Sönmez, 1999). Most importantly, such ecolabels would prompt tourists to seek out environmentally friendly tourism enterprises for their holiday needs. In response to the increasing demand among tourists for environmentally benign tourism, tourism enterprises would be pressured to monitor their industrial practices and improve their environmental standards, thereby supplying tourists with products and services having reduced environmental impacts (West, 1995). In practice, a tourism enterprise seeking an ecolabel or ecoseal is required to meet specified standards and preset criteria identified by the third-party environmental accreditation scheme offering the label (Mihalic, 2000). The following discussion furnishes the reader with a step-by-step description of the tourism ecolabeling process.

3.1. The tourism ecolabeling process

According to Davis (1997, p. 138), the procedures followed by third-party ecolabeling programs may be broadly classified into six central steps. Within the tourism context, ecolabels would be awarded to qualifying tourism enterprises by third-party ecolabeling programs through a systematic process encapsulating these six steps (see Fig. 1):

Step 1: *Tourism sector selection*. This step necessitates strong involvement from a panel representing an array of tourism stakeholders, including tourism planners and government officials, private tourism enterprises and associations, environmentally oriented non-governmental organizations, local citizens' groups, tourists, and staff members of the ecolabeling organization. Stakeholders would select a particular category from a non-exhaustive list of tourism sectors—tour-operators, travel agencies, resorts/hotels, and/or other tourism service providers.

Step 2: *Environmental impact evaluation*. In this phase of the ecolabeling process, all possible environmental impacts of the tourism sector selected in Step 1, e.g., tour-operators, would be documented using the life-cycle assessment (LCA) or "cradle-to-grave" environmental accounting methodology (Grodsky, 1993; Wildavsky, 1996; Hemmelskamp & Brockmann, 1997; Rhodes & Brown, 1997; Jensen et al., 1998). Ideally, this would include environmental impacts such as air and water pollution, noise pollution, solid waste, changes in

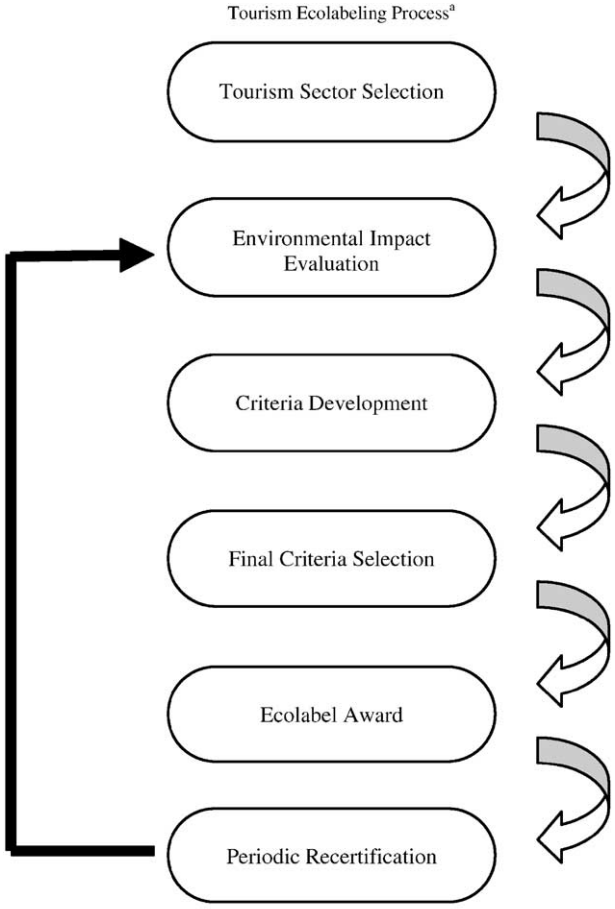

Fig. 1. Tourism ecolabeling process.

the composition of flora and fauna, soil erosion, geophysical changes, utilization of raw materials, and energy consumption. Next, the most critical environmental impacts produced by the tourism sector are identified.

Step 3: *Criteria development*. A preliminary index of criteria for reducing the environmental impacts associated with the tourism sector, identified in Step 2 are peer-reviewed by the panel of tourism stakeholders involved in Step 1.

Step 4: *Final criteria selection*. Based upon a consensus of the stakeholder peer-reviewers, a final index of limited multiple-attribute criteria (Grodsky, 1993) for environmental impacts associated with the tourism sector is determined by the ecolabeling agency.

Step 5: *Ecolabel award*. A tourism enterprise applying for an 'ecoseal' or 'ecolabel' would be awarded the same by the ecolabeling agency only if the business either surpasses or at least meets the final criteria of environmental impacts (Grodsky, 1993) associated with its sector (e.g., tour operators) of the tourism industry. If the tourism enterprise meets the final criteria set forth by the ecolabeling agency, it would then pay a licensing fee to the ecolabeling agency (Kusz, 1997; Shimp & Rattray, 1997) for the use of its eco-certification, symbol, logo or flag in its marketing and promotional efforts as well as day-to-day operations.

Step 6: *Periodic recertification*. The index of environmental impact criteria are re-evaluated, usually every three years (Shimp & Rattray, 1997), to determine whether the existing criteria match technological and innovative advancements in the tourism industry pertaining to the amelioration of environmental impacts. If new reinforced criteria (for inducing additional environmental improvements) are adopted by the ecolabeling agency, previously certified tourism enterprises would be required to apply for recertification by the ecolabeling agency.

Scientifically, ecolabeling schemes for the tourism industry would assess the environmental impacts of tourism enterprises through their entire life cycle.[1] Owing to the multi-resource dependence of the tourism industry, life-cycle assessments would not be effective in identifying the entire scale, magnitude, and range of environmental impacts generated by tourism enterprises. Moreover, most of these impacts are far-reaching and impossible to measure using the life-cycle assessment technique. Ecolabeling agencies would have to be well acquainted with the gamut of impacts (including their scale and magnitude) produced by various sectors of the tourism industry before performing the impact analysis and improvement analysis phases of life-cycle assessment.

4. Natural resource impacts of tourism development in developing countries

Tourism development depends upon diverse arrays of overlaying resource characteristics relating to the biophysical environment (climatic conditions, topographic features, ecosystems and habitats), unlike other industries that are single resource-based (Wilkinson, 1994; Burton, 1995). The scarcity of natural resources faced by most developing countries (Zhang et al., 1999) increases the susceptibility and vulnerability of these resources to tourism development activities in host

[1] By definition, the life-cycle analysis technique used to assess the environmental impacts of the tourism enterprise would include: (1) life cycle inventory—the identification and quantification of energy consumption, raw materials used and the wastes discharged into the environment by the enterprise during the course of providing tourism-related services, (2) environmental impact analysis—the computation of the cumulative environmental impacts produced by the inputs and outputs over the life of the enterprise (Salzhauer, 1991; Grodsky, 1993), and (3) improvement analysis—the utilization of information gathered through the previous steps to reduce the environmental impacts of tourism enterprises during their respective life-cycles (Salzhauer, 1991).

destinations. Owing to tourism's complex multi-faceted nature and multi-resource dependence, tourism development in such regions inadvertently instills far-reaching impacts on their natural environment, biotas and ecosystems (Freestone, 1991; Mitchell & Barborak, 1991; Smith, 1992; Maragos, 1993; Nunn, 1994; Gilman, 1997).

Tourism development in developing countries is manifested in three core forms—nature-based (or eco-) tourism, coastal (or beach) tourism, and heritage (or cultural) tourism (Lumsdon & Swift, 1998). Tourism in these countries is promoted primarily on the appeal of their natural resources and landscape (Fennell & Eagles, 1990). Moreover, tourism in developing countries is oftentimes built around sensitive ecosystems (Butler, 1990). Natural resource problems associated with tourism development include—degradation of ecosystems (including flora and fauna) in national parks, forests, preserves and wetlands (Sindiga, 1999; Sindiga & Kanunah, 1999; Kousis, 2000); animal harassment by tourist vehicles (Sindiga & Kanunah, 1999); intensive water extraction and effluent solid waste disposal (Sindiga & Kanunah, 1999; Kousis, 2000), depletion of grazing lands and water resources (Ap & Crompton, 1998; Akama, 1999); loss of vegetation coverage, soil erosion and increasing mineral soil exposure, and tree damage and root exposure (Obua & Harding, 1997); habitat fragmentation and degradation, introduction of exotic (non-native) species, and commercialization of wildlife leading to the decline and extinction of wildlife species (Baker, 1997); and noise, fresh water, land and air pollution (Shackley, 1996; Kousis, 2000).

Coastal ecosystem types particularly prone to severe impacts as a result of tourism-related activities include: shorelines (Dobias & Bunpapong, 1990); offshore waters, estuaries, coral reefs, sea-grass beds, sandy beaches (Clark, 1990; GFANC, 1997; Hinrichsen, 1998); mangrove forests (Wright, Urish, & Runge, 1991; GFANC, 1997; Hinrichsen, 1998); riparian habitats and near-coastal wetlands (GFANC, 1997; Hinrichsen, 1998); and salt marshes and coastal dunes (GFANC, 1997). The natural resources of coastal regions are susceptible to tourism's detrimental impacts due to their unique characteristics: frailty of biotas (Nunn, 1994), biomes and ecosystems, and strong interface and interrelationships between terrestrial and marine environments (Wilkinson, 1994, p. 41), combined with increasing population density (Farrell, 1986; Yapp, 1986; WCC, 1993; Hinrichsen, 1998) and inadequate legislative framework, administrative infrastructure and management capabilities (Hickman & Cocklin, 1992; Wilkinson, 1994; Wescott, 1998).

Evidently, tourism development in developing countries has the potential to destroy the very unique natural resources and biophysical environment required for the sustainability of the industry, including the ecosystems that serve as habitats for human populace and large numbers of flora, fauna and aquatic species. The inherently unique character of the host destinations of developing countries and the distinctiveness of the tourism industry nourished by the uncommon characteristics of these areas have played a complementary role in producing endemic environmental impacts (Wong, 1993). While some of these impacts (e.g., the total amount of energy consumed and the quantity of solid waste generated) are quantifiable and easy to calculate, assessments of other impacts (e.g., the micro- and macro-level effects of emissions on air and water quality, public health, natural ecosystems, or on the global climate) are often tedious and impossible to ascertain (Salzhauer, 1991). Thus, the prospect of determining the environmental impacts of a tourism enterprise during the course of its entire life cycle remains bleak and ill conceived. Furthermore, tourism ecolabel awards are often based on a circumscribed collection of measurable criteria and do not address all measurable environmental indicators (Williams & Morgan, 1995). The lack of appropriate scientific techniques to analyze the whole spectrum of environmental impacts associated with a tourism enterprise would pose serious obstacles for ecolabeling agencies during the vital phases of their programs. Besides the obvious setbacks of impact analysis within the life-cycle assessment stage of ecolabeling, several logistical factors have the potential to dog ecolabeling schemes, as described in the following section.

5. Practicability issues relating to tourism ecolabeling in developing countries

The introduction of ecolabeling schemes focusing on tourism in developing countries would provide an opportunity for potential tourists to review the environmental sensitivity of tourism-related services and products before making their final travel (purchasing) decisions, while prompting tourism industry sectors to meet prescribed environmental standards that would minimize their impacts on natural resources. However, a close analysis of the feasibility of utilizing ecolabels for certifying tourism enterprises in developing countries brings to surface a number of unworkable issues pertaining to the entire concept, ranging from the conflicting roles played by stakeholders in the ecolabeling process to the inaccurate methodology used for developing evaluation criteria. Based on Sasidharan and Font's (2001) review of the potential pitfalls of ecolabeling programs, the proceeding discussion presents a conceptual analysis of the ecolabeling process for developing countries. Additionally, key issues and potential obstacles that could severely encumber the ecolabeling process in developing countries are

introduced as untested hypotheses. These hypotheses are proposed with the intention of facilitating and guiding future research for evaluating the effectiveness of ecolabels, in general, and with particular emphasis on the feasibility of adopting ecolabeling schemes for certifying tourism enterprises in developing countries.

5.1. Impact assessment criteria: business interests versus environmental protection

Owing to the lack of a universally accepted scientific methodology for the assessment of environmental impacts (West, 1995; Wildavsky, 1996) produced by a tourism enterprise throughout its entire life cycle, the identification of indicators and criteria for the environmental impact assessment phase of the ecolabeling process is oftentimes based on the discretion of the ecolabeling agency (Salzhauer, 1991; Dudley, Elliott, & Stolton, 1997). The unavailability of tailor-made databases for documenting life-cycle inventories of various sectors of the tourism industry and low levels of cooperation from tourism enterprises towards disclosure of operations-related information would adversely effect the scientific accuracy of the inventory and impact analysis phases of life-cycle assessments for tourism enterprises. This would lead to the identification of environmental impacts which are easily addressable, thereby furnishing unreliable improvement analyses (Salzhauer, 1991) for business enterprises within the tourism industry.

The identification of environmental impacts and development of evaluation criteria for tourism enterprises would be highly influenced by the preferences of parties with vested interests in the tourism industry. The domination of the private-sector tourism lobby in ecolabeling programs would shape the impact assessment criteria as a product created through compromises between environmental protection and profit-oriented agenda of tourism businesses (West, 1995; Dudley et al., 1997; Kusz, 1997), rather than serving as a tool for assessing the environmental standards of a tourism enterprise (Kusz, 1997). For example, under ISO 14001, an environmental management system standard against which a tourism business is certified, a company would be able to meet International Standards Organization (ISO) requirements and gain certification, even if it is in legal dispute or in conflict with environmentalists and local communities of the tourism destination (Honey & Rome, 2000a). Hence, impacts that pose undesirable economic consequences to tourism enterprises would be addressed to a greater extent compared to scientifically important and complex ones such as impacts on species composition, biodiversity, migration, etc. For instance, one of the essential criteria for receiving certification from Blue Flag, an international program for certifying beaches and marinas, is that no industrial pollution or sewage-related discharges may adversely impact the beach area of the tourism destination (Honey & Rome, 2000a). While the environmental impacts of a tourism enterprise on the beach area may be prioritized by an ecolabeling agency primarily due to its ecological, aesthetic and economic undesirability, the non-localized, detrimental effects of the tourism enterprise on the general ecosystem of the area and surrounding coastal waters do not receive adequate attention and are often downplayed. Thus, the local-level , site-specific orientation and interests of tourism businesses would concentrate the focus of ecolabeling programs on site-specific environmental impacts, rather than macro-level impacts (such as global climate change). Socio-cultural impacts such as erosion of cultural identity, over-development of cultural landscapes and heritage sites, and changing attitudes of local communities are likely to be downplayed, and even overlooked, by ecolabeling programs due to the methodological complications associated with measuring these impacts and resolving them. The effectiveness of tourism ecolabeling schemes would depend on the adoption of scientifically reliable life-cycle assessment techniques that identify both environmental as well as socio-cultural impacts associated with tourism enterprises. Based on this review, the first proposition may be offered as follows:

Proposition 1. *Impact assessment criteria will emerge as a compromised product, and not necessarily as an altruistic means for evaluating a tourism enterprise's overall environmental performance.*

5.2. Ecolabeling decisions: domination by the privileged

The board members of ecolabeling agencies and stakeholders from the tourism industry involved in the ecolabeling process may be comprised of representatives from both public and private sector of the tourism industry. The involvement of a wide range of tourism industry stakeholders, representing diverse interests (e.g., environmental conservation, community involvement and development, economic revitalization, etc.) may generate potential conflicts of interest during the process of making ecolabeling decisions. These conflicts would result in procedural difficulties while addressing issues pertaining to tourism sector category selection and criteria finalization. While the majority of the tourism industry stakeholders, representing the large-scale enterprises of the private sector, involved in the ecolabeling process (Grodsky, 1993) would work towards the development of environmental standards that best suit their business interests, the fear of failing to meet the set standards would discourage most small-scale enterprises originating in the developing countries from participating in the initiation phase of ecolabeling programs (Kusz, 1997). For example, local industry representation and participation in global tourism

ecolabeling programs such as Green Globe 21, ECOTEL or Blue Flag is extremely negligible or non-existent in tourism destinations in Africa (Honey & Rome, 2000a). Thus, ecolabeling decisions would reflect the judgement(s) of the group or groups with the sufficient time and resources (personnel and financial) to participate in the ecolabeling process (West, 1995). Certification programs such as Green Globe 21 are developed, financed and staffed by tourism industry trade associations and other major players, such as hotel chains, within the tourism industry who comprise the majority of stakeholders involved in the design and implementation of ecolabeling schemes (Honey & Rome, 2000a). Most tourism ecolabeling schemes are prone to be plagued by the problem of greater involvement from large-scale enterprises of the private-sector coupled with underrepresentation from small-scale businesses (Grodsky, 1993) and other groups, such as government personnel, citizens groups and tourists, who would be deterred from attending resource (time, money and personnel) intensive working sessions during crucial phases of ecolabeling programs (West, 1995). Consequently, the final decisions made during various phases of the ecolabeling process would seldom represent a justifiable consensus among tourism industry stakeholders. For example, the three-tiered certification approach, endorsed by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), Rainforest Alliance, and Australia's Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program (NEAP), which separately certifies ecotourism, sustainable tourism and mass tourism enterprises is not accepted by others involved in certification programs (Honey & Rome, 2000a). Ecotourism experts and environmentalists in Central America and Sri Lanka believe that there should be only one tier in a certification program, covering the entire range from conventional to ecotourism businesses, rather than three certification tiers. In order to claim and establish business credibility, it would be necessary for ecolabeling programs to maintain an independent and neutral status while avoiding certification biases arising from discrepancies in the composition of representatives (e.g., more large-scale enterprise representatives than others) (West, 1995).

The inadequacy of time, money and personnel resources would also affect the extent to which stakeholders are involved during the environmental impact identification phase of ecolabeling programs. Owing to the limited amount of resources available to most stakeholders to conduct the same, once again large-scale enterprises of the private-sector would play the lead role in recommending and funding environmental scientists, researchers and specialists, with expertise in environmental and natural resource issues, for analyzing environmental impacts associated with tourism sectors. In the case of ISO 14001, a private circle of tourism industry representatives were responsible for establishing international environmental standards, without accounting for participation in environmental decision-making from governmental and non-governmental entities from developing countries (Honey & Rome, 2000a). Thus, only a selected few, with the personnel and financial sponsorship from affluent, large-scale enterprises, would be responsible for conducting and interpreting environmental impact analyses, thereby incapacitating other stakeholders from participating in the same. Small-scale tourism enterprises and other underprivileged, resource-deficient parties or stakeholders involved in the ecolabeling process would have little involvement when it comes to making decisions regarding allowable thresholds of environmental damages/impacts for tourism sectors, in terms of scale and magnitude. Ecolabeling schemes should recognize the environmental preferences and priorities of these underprivileged stakeholders as well as tourists and other users of the natural resource during the entire course of the certification process (Morgan, 1999). Based on this review, the second proposition may be offered as follows:

Proposition 2. *Ecolabeling decisions will reflect the judgments of the group with adequate time and resources (personnel and financial) to participate in the ecolabeling process.*

5.3. Certification criteria: re-establishment of standards

Privately owned, small-scale tour-operators, travel agents, lodges, hotels, etc. (Friel, 1999) constitute the major portion of the tourism industry in developing countries. The majority of these small-scale enterprises and agencies would be incapable of meeting the strict criteria and standards developed by ecolabeling schemes, usually owing to the lack of financial capacity to operate environmentally friendly tourism services. The high costs of operating eco-sensitive tourism projects in developing countries are often affordable only to large-scale companies and multinational enterprises. The financial inadequacy and incapability of the small-scale tourism enterprises in these countries to meet the stringent standards and criteria set by ecolabeling schemes as well as their inability to absorb the sharp initiation and compliance monitoring costs associated with the ecolabeling process (Grodsky, 1993) would discourage them from participating in tourism ecolabeling programs. According to a study by the Pacific Institute, the financial costs for attaining certification from ISO 14001 (a program which promotes improved environmental performance) are usually high (ranging from $500 to $15,000) and affordable only to the largest hotels and this prohibitive cost may restrict market access for small and medium enterprises and firms in developing countries (Honey & Rome,

2000a). Tourism enterprises that manage to meet the criteria set forth by ecolabeling schemes may potentially reconsider their continued affiliation with ecolabeling programs due to the high certification and licensing fees to be paid to the ecolabeling agency for awarding and issuing ecolabels to tourism enterprises, the possibility of future non-recertification due to unsatisfactory standards and practices that fail to meet new, re-established criteria, and the surmounting costs associated with periodic recertification (usually after one to three years) (Salzhauer, 1991; Shimp & Rattray, 1997). Additionally, the prevalence of conflicts between profit-oriented private sector stakeholders and pro-environmental stakeholders with antibusiness agendas (Salzhauer, 1991) would lead to escalating industry disinterest in ecolabeling programs. Responding to the concern of environmental interests being marginalized from the ecolabeling process and the inhibitory effect of stringent criteria and standards on tourism industry stakeholder involvement, environmental interest stakeholders may have to ease their set standards and reestablish new criteria for acceptable levels of environmental impacts. Eventually, ecolabeling programs would be pressured into lowering their certification standards (West, 1995) for offsetting both the increasing non-involvement of tourism industry stakeholders in ecolabeling schemes, particularly among small-scale enterprises (Kusz, 1997) and the consequent insufficiency of sponsors for funding ecolabeling initiatives. The lowering of certification criteria and standards would increase industry participation in ecolabeling schemes while extending the mileage of such programs.

Tourism ecolabeling programs present the hidden risk of impeding innovative initiatives within the industry toward ameliorating the negative environmental impacts associated with tourism development. Since the ecolabel awarded to tourism enterprises would be the same, regardless of whether they meet the highest standards of environmental sensitivity or the minimal standards identified in the evaluation criteria (Shimp & Rattray, 1997), most ecolabeled enterprises would have little interest in committing themselves to future efforts for identifying better, innovative ways to reduce detrimental resource impacts (Wildavsky, 1996). Additionally, environmental certification programs will hold businesses such as eco-lodges that are already maintaining superior environmental standards to much higher standards than their competitors who do not adhere to environmentally-sensitive business practices (Honey & Rome, 2000a). Most small-scale tourism enterprises of developing countries would be precluded from future recertification by ecolabeling programs owing to their financial insufficiency to meet the prohibitive expenses associated with the adoption of innovative measures for complying with stricter re-established criteria and standards in the future, while maintaining adequate profit margins (Salzhauer, 1991). Based on this review, the third proposition may be offered as follows:

Proposition 3. *Non-involvement from small enterprise stakeholders in tourism ecolabeling schemes and the consequent insufficiency of sponsors for funding ecolabeling programs will result in the lowering of certification standards for increasing industry participation and for increasing the mileage of such programs.*

5.4. Ecolabels: market exclusion through eco-protectionism

Ecolabeling schemes and programs for manufactured goods have predominantly originated in developed countries e.g., United States, Canada, Germany, Austria, Sweden, France, Japan, Australia, (Lal, 1996; Eiderströem, 1997; Hemmelskamp & Brockmann, 1997; Kusz, 1997; Parris, 1998). Similarly, most tourism ecolabeling schemes have their origins and/or funding sources located in developed nations. Tourism ecolabeling schemes initiated by developing countries are oftentimes supported, through management and funding, by similar programs based in developed countries. For example, the Caribbean Alliance for Sustainable Tourism (CAST), a non-profit subsidiary company of the Caribbean Hotel Association responsible for hotel certification, works in joint-partnership with Green Globe 21, a for-profit agency based in the United Kingdom (Honey & Rome, 2000b). Costa Rica's Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST), an accommodation certification agency which works closely with Blue Flag (owned and operated by the Foundation for Environmental Education in Europe or FEEE), is operated by the Costa Rican Tourism Institute and INCAE, a business school connected with the United States' Harvard University (Honey & Rome, 2000b). Similarly, the ISO 14001: Sri Lanka Pilot Project, a certification program for beach resorts in Sri Lanka, is financed by USAID (Honey & Rome, 2000b), an independent United States federal government agency that conducts foreign assistance and humanitarian aid to advance the political and economic interests of the United States. The environmental standards and criteria set forth by tourism ecolabeling schemes would largely downplay the local industry perspectives of developing countries, and would be mainly geared toward business interests of developed countries (West, 1995; Lal, 1996). Furthermore, the conflicting economic, political, social, and environmental agendas (and priorities) of developed and developing countries would hinder attempts to set up tourism ecolabeling initiatives that are mutually acceptable to both parties. Stringent certification standards for industry practices, leaning towards the politicized criteria identified by developed countries, imposed by ecolabeling schemes within the profit-oriented tourism development policies of the developing

countries would be logistically unattainable to most local tourism enterprises of developing countries (West, 1995).

Ecolabeling programs in developing countries run the risk of being influenced by both the business protectionist strategies of large-scale tourism enterprises such as resorts, hotel chains, tour-operators and travel agencies as well as the environmental orientation of tourists mostly from western, developed countries. Large-scale tourism enterprises owned and operated by companies originating in developed nations could use their eco-certification as a strategy, i.e., eco-proctectionism, for inveigling 'environmentally conscious' western tourists, thereby offsetting competition for such tourists from non-ecolabeled local tourism enterprises of developing countries (Lal, 1996; Wildavsky, 1996). Thus, ecolabeled foreign business enterprises would acquire a sizeable amount of the 'environmentally conscious tourist' market share by vilifying non-ecolabeled local businesses based on their environmental incompatibility while promoting themselves as being eco-sensitive. The business profitability threat posed to non-ecolabeled, local enterprises through market exclusion and loss of the 'environmentally conscious tourist' market share and subsequent decline would potentially lead to the ostracism of foreign ecolabeling schemes by local businesses and governments of developing countries. This would be followed by the establishment of locally owned and controlled tourism ecolabeling programs to counteract the efforts of foreign schemes. For example, in Costa Rica, four different ecolabeling programs namely, CST, New Key, Green Globe, and ECOTEL, have all rated and certified accommodations and hotels based on their environmental standards (Honey & Rome, 2000a). The presence of a plethora of ecolabels, environmental certifications, and awarding bodies would impede the tourists' ability to clearly understand the environmental sensitivity of tourism enterprises. Consequently, tourists will base their judgements and decisions on the amount of facts and data, disclosed by environmental certification agencies, regarding the environmental performance and associated impacts of ecolabeled tourism enterprises. Based on this review, the fourth proposition may be offered as follows:

Proposition 4. *The certification criteria set forth by tourism ecolabeling schemes will be based upon local interests in developed countries and will not take developing countries and their local industry perspectives into account.*

5.5. Information disclosure: incomprehensive and confusing

Information furnished through tourism ecolabels is meant to assist tourists in identifying and selecting environmentally friendly products and services offered by tourism enterprises by shedding light on key environmental performance indicators pertaining to the operational characteristics of these enterprises (Lynch, 1997). Since the criteria developed for measuring and evaluating tourism enterprises' environmental sensitivity would emerge as a product of negotiations and compromise between industry stakeholders and environmental proponents, the information furnished by tourism ecolabels would provide a deliberately abridged account of the environmental impacts associated with tourism enterprises. Thus, tourism ecolabels would not enlighten tourists with altruistic descriptions of the entire gamut of environmental impacts produced by a particular tourism enterprise. Moreover, several aspects of the environment are subjectively judged and categorized as suitable or unsuitable by ecolabeling agencies, while disregarding the diverse preferences (and priorities) of users of the natural resource as well as the varying uses of the resource (Morgan, 1999). The subjectively filtered, technically constructed and circumlocutory narrative (Wildavsky, 1996; Davis, 1997) offered by tourism ecolabeling schemes may deprive potential tourists of an unbiased, comprehensive environmental sensitivity assessment, thereby misinforming them regarding environmentally relevant issues (Shimp & Rattray, 1997). For instance, Green Globe 21 allows tourism enterprises and destinations that become members to use its logo from the time they are officially committed to becoming certified (Honey & Rome, 2000a, p. 21). ECOTEL offers lodging facilities with a different logo for each of five areas—(1) solid waste management, (2) energy efficiency, (3) water conservation, (4) employee environmental education and community, and (5) environmental legislation compliance and native land preservation involvement—and each logo is a product of a three-level scoring system, 'allowing members to display a combination of logos as they progress to different levels in each of the five areas' (Honey & Rome, 2000a, p. 22). The Costa Rican CST ranks its certified tourism enterprises by scoring them on a scale of one to five for their performance in four different areas (Honey & Rome, 2000a, p. 22). The wide array of value-laden technical jargons (e.g., recycled, pollution-free, sustainable, etc.) used by various tourism ecolabeling programs and the contradictory information disseminated by such schemes would impede tourists from making objective judgements regarding the legitimacy of tourism enterprises' environmental sensitivity claims (Wildavsky, 1996) in addition to exacerbating their confusion. The proliferation of ecolabels and awarding bodies in the absence of a non-aligned, neutral, widely accepted agency for monitoring, controlling and regulating the efforts of tourism ecolabeling schemes in developing countries would raise suspicion and distrust among tourists towards the credibility of ecolabels (House & Herring, 1995;

Morgan, 1999). Further, tourists would become increasingly indifferent to the environmental claims raised by ecolabeled tourism enterprises and eco-certification programs.

Owing to the primary focus of tourism ecolabels on the environmental performance of tourism enterprises, socio-cultural impacts produced by tourism enterprises that could potentially damage the social fabric, cultural identity, traditional lifestyles and quality of life of host destinations and indigenous populations of developing countries are likely to be downplayed by ecolabels. For instance, the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS), a certification scheme regulated by the European Union requires certification seeking businesses to furnish an initial environmental impact assessment in addition to information on environmental improvements in the companies' annual reports (Honey & Rome, 2000a). Such certification schemes lack mandates for the disclosure of data on business-related impacts having social and cultural consequences. Ecolabeled tourism enterprises would utilize their (environmental) market distinction to project themselves as forerunners of environmentally compatible business practices while actively espousing the cause of environmental compliance to overshadow the socio-cultural impacts produced as a direct result of their operations and services. Since most tourists remain unaware regarding the existence of tourism ecolabels and certification programs and far fewer understand the meaning of the same, tourism industry stakeholders would have to undertake the preeminent task of educating tourists with respect to the need, utility, purpose, goals and scope of tourism ecolabels (Morris, Hastak & Mazis, 1995; Eisen, 1997) alongside efforts towards creating or adopting tourism ecolabeling programs. Based on this review, the fifth proposition may be offered as follows:

Proposition 5. *Tourism ecolabeling schemes will provide potential tourists with only a subjective and filtered narrative of the environmental impacts produced by a particular tourism enterprise, thereby misinforming and depriving them of a validated, in-depth environmental impact analysis.*

6. Conclusion

Utilization of tourism ecolabels would be highly compatible with the environmentally compatible tourism initiatives of developing countries (Jensen et al., 1998). The potential of ecolabels to maintain and even enhance the physical environment by educating potential tourists regarding the environmental attributes of tourism enterprises and fostering environmentally sensitive business operations among such enterprises would make the concept particularly appealing to developing countries (see Table 2). The principal objective of the discussion presented in this paper is to generate awareness regarding the problems associated with the adoption of ecolabeling programs by developing countries. As highlighted by the propositions presented in the previous section of this paper, several hidden barriers relating to the applicability and workability of tourism ecolabeling schemes for developing countries become evident upon analyzing the ecolabeling process. Ecolabeling issues faced by developing nations would vary depending on the environmental resources of individual countries as well as their characteristic socio-cultural, economic, and political climates. Although this paper vacillates from offering specific, cookie-cutter courses of action for dealing with ecolabeling problems confronted by developing countries, it is important for developing nations to give due consideration to these issues in the design and operation of tourism ecolabeling schemes. In spite of the fact that ecolabeling agencies continue to advocate the environmental benefits of their schemes, to date no conclusive evidence exists to support their assertive claims that ecolabels improve the environment (Weissman, 1997). Further, social science research suggests that environmental education of consumers and increasing environmental awareness does not stimulate environmentally responsible purchasing behavior (Hemmelskamp & Brockmann, 1997). Similarly, despite the environment-oriented educative potential of tourism ecolabels, potential tourists may not respond favorably to ecolabels and the enterprises that market their eco-sensitive tourism services and products (House & Herring, 1995; Morgan, 1999).

Tourists may respond positively to ecolabeling schemes established by groups already well known and respected for efforts in protecting the natural environment in developing countries (Salzhauer, 1991). However, the high costs incurred by tourism enterprises in the process of acquiring ecolabels (Shimp & Rattray, 1997) and the costs associated with running an environmentally sensitive operation coupled with the business objective of increasing profit margins would lead ecolabeled enterprises to increase the prices of their tourism services and products offered to tourists. The additional costs for the tourists, entailed with the 'purchase' of ecolabeled services (Hemmelskamp & Brockmann, 1997) may dissuade them from making 'high-priced' purchasing decisions in favor of ecolabeled tourism enterprises. Non-ecolabeled tourism enterprises would ultimately benefit from the growing sensitivity of tourists towards the high prices of ecolabeled services.

Most importantly, the great degree of scientific uncertainty and unreliability pertaining to the environmental impact analyses performed by tourism ecolabeling agencies would have an adverse effect on the levels of participation of stakeholders in ecolabeling programs.

Table 2
Benefits of tourism ecolabels

Benefactor	Benefits
Tourism industry	Curbs tourism's negative environmental impacts by encouraging tourism enterprises to attain high environmental standards Exerts pressure on the tourism industry to improve environmental performance by adopting effective and tangible environmental management techniques Improves industry practices by fostering environmentally sensitive business operations Assists the tourism industry in developing standards for environmentally sensitive tourism services and products Conforms to the concept of environmentally compatible tourism alongside of natural resource management, environmental conservation and protection, and pollution control policies Strategic tool for officially approving and promoting the design, production, marketing and use of environmentally benign services and products having a reduced environmental impact Disseminates externally validated information on the environmental impacts of tourism products and services among tourism consumers Can be extended to certify the environmental soundness of tourist destinations and the natural resources at these destinations
Tourism enterprises	Communicates the environmental credentials of companies Gives companies differential advantage over their competitors (gainful market position) as a result of fewer impacts on the environment than other similar enterprises Promotes the environmental achievements of companies via marketing campaigns (pamphlets, flyers, brochures, press releases, notice boards, and display of award logos and flags), both within and off-premises Serves as an incentive for companies to maintain and improve environmental performance standards, thereby reducing environmental impacts Assists companies in marketing their environmentally friendly services and/or products to high spending, environmentally conscious tourists Tourists develop positive attitudes toward the companies' products and/or services
Tourists	Educates tourists in originating countries regarding the impacts of their tourism-related actions and decisions Furnishes tourists with 'better' information on the environmental impacts of tourism enterprises Prompts tourists to act in favor of environmentally sensitive tourism enterprises through their purchasing decisions Enables tourists to make informed choices while selecting tourism enterprises for their vacations

Further, conflicts of interest among stakeholders involved in the ecolabeling process and the predominance of profit-oriented tourism industry interests would affect the environmental focus and agenda of ecolabeling schemes in the long run. Additionally, the resource insufficiency of small-scale tourism enterprises of developing countries to make heavy investments in technology required for environmental protection while maintaining adequate profit margins would preclude such enterprises from meeting the prohibitive standards and criteria prescribed by ecolabeling schemes. Thus, ecolabels would facilitate the emergence of large, multi-national tourism enterprises as 'environmental market leaders', thereby providing them with a marketing edge over small-scale enterprises of developing countries. Overall, tourism ecolabels would serve as a protectionist strategy for large-scale enterprises in their efforts toward capturing the tourism market share, irrespective of their environmental impact potential. Rather than contributing to environmentally sensitive tourism development and protection of natural resources of developing countries from the detrimental environmental impacts of tourism, ecolabels are likely to function as nothing more than marketing gimmicks for large-scale enterprises of the growing tourism industry.

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