



Graduate School Society and Culture in Motion  
Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg  
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# Workshop Report

## Sustainability, Nature Conservation and Community Development

### Perspectives from the Anthropology of Tourism

Workshop of the Graduate School  
„Society and Culture in Motion“  
organized by Sophie Strauss and Joao Afonso Baptista

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by  
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## Background

The main intention behind the workshop was to explore the role of sustainability, both in its ecological and cultural meaning, in nature conservation and in the so-called “community development”. Main questions discussed during the workshop were the motivations of state, global and local institutions in labeling their tourism planning and projects as “eco”, “sustainable” or “community-based”, all of them terms from the global sustainability discourse that had come up after the Brundtland Report “Our common Future” of 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development. Sustainable development is there defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED 1987). The principle of “sustainability”, both in its cultural and ecological aspects, has since then been integrated into the mainstream of development and economy, the tourism business being one branch among many. Goals of these sustainable forms of tourism are the bettering of the economic situation of the “host communities” by their integration in the planning and implementation while preserving so-called cultural traditions and improving nature conservation by building up economic alternatives. How does this global trend affect the local level, how is it appropriated locally? Based on the experts’ case studies, we debated the effects planning schemes have on the local and global level, on material and economic conditions, and also attitudes, discourses, ideas and representations of sustainability, self and *otherness*. How is the ideology of sustainability represented and negotiated in different regions of the world linked by the global business of tourism? In what ways are the relations between hosts and guests creatively and adaptively shaped along the lines of this global trend? Is sustainable tourism, for example, a form of community empowerment or nature conservation, a developmental solution or rather the outcome of capitalist or state imperialism system(s)? What are the interests of the state and/or local or international investors in the alleged ethical and responsible tourism development? How do small-scale societies in naturally and culturally attractive areas deal with the ever-growing interest in sustainable tourism development? These were some of the main questions addressed in the case studies presented and in the following discussions.

## First Day

On the first day Prof. Matthias Kaufmann, speaker of the Graduate School, pointed out the relevance of sustainability a global phenomenon for the disciplines united in the Graduate School. He underlined how the concept of “sustainability”, even in the strict meaning of natural or ecological sustainability is also a social manifestation and an ideology of global scale that has to be studied also by social sciences.

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In the first lecture of the workshop, titled *Tourism and the Ideology of Sustainability*, Prof. Dr. Burkhard Schnepel, professor at the Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle-Wittenberg and now Dean of the Philosophical Faculty I Halle-Wittenberg, showed for a case study based on his research in Mauritius, how mass tourism can become the cause of clashing conceptions of development and sustainability. With the tourism boom in Mauritius, the beaches became a contested resource; and natural and cultural sustainability have become arguments in the hunt for or protests against their touristic exploitation. Thence force, beaches in Mauritius have practically become divided into public and private beaches with exclusion of the local population from their use. Ecological sustainability as an ideology was used by various actors to prevent the exploitation of a small Mauritian island by private investors. Schnepel pointed out the variety of actors, arguments and interests involved on the different levels that go far beyond the dichotomy of private international investment and mass tourism development on the one hand and exploited ecosystems and local communities on the other (see also Schnepel/Schnepel 2008, Schnepel 2009).

As a keynote speaker we were able to invite Dr. Jim Butcher, Senior lecturer at Canterbury Christ Church University (GBR), who completed his PhD in Birmingham on the Sociology of Tourism. Dr Butcher's interests have focused on the sociology of contemporary tourism, the policy and development aspects of ecotourism, and on the relationship between mass tourism and new tourism. His book, *The Moralisation of Tourism: Sun, Sand...and Saving the World?* (2003), which was developed from this work, has attracted attention for its critical view of sustainable tourism. Dr. Butcher has published extensively and critically on the morality of tourism and the role of "sustainable" or "eco-" tourism in development. In his keynote lecture titled *Tradition, Community and Conservation: Ecotourism as a Development Option* Dr. Jim Butcher took up the question of ideologies behind community-based development and sustainable tourism from a different angle and highlighted critically the pressure and lure of moralization behind such attributes to tourism that promise developmental benefits for the local communities and a clear conscience for travelers. He examined the main claims for which "eco-tourism" has been advocated as a sustainable rural development to draw upon, not contradict tradition; to work with, not against community, and to conserve rather than transform environments. In his talk he critically analyzed the evolution of the debate and argued that development is too often tied to localised, natural limits through, ironically, a discussion of community agency. From his point of view, such "moral" versions of conventional tourism hinder real development and force local communities into a fixed constructed role of "the poor, environmentally friendly" local, who the ethical tourist seeks in them. He sharply criticized eco-tourism or sustainable tourism as forms of sustainable development especially from the economic aspects for the local communities and the amount of external control (see also Butcher 2008, 2007, 2006).

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## Second Day

The second day started with four presentations of case studies by PhD candidates and Post-Docs from the MLU Halle-Wittenberg, all of them Social Anthropologists. The first talk was by João Afonso Baptista with the title *Beyond Community-Based Tourism. Development and the Project of Community in Canhane, Mozambique*. It was based on his fieldwork in Mozambique and the findings of his PhD thesis. Baptista focused on the moral aspects behind community-based tourism in the village he studied and the production of “community” in order to convincingly sell ethical tourism to visitors.

In the next presentation by Dr. Felix Girke, ZIRS MLU Halle Wittenberg: *Heritage Behavior and validating Consumption: how a Community in Southern Ethiopia deals with (tourist) Film-Makers*, he drew on his long-term ethnographic research for his PhD in Ethiopia to show what implications tourism and the sustainability debate have on natural and cultural heritage in the region.

In her following presentation *Environmental Discourses in a Conflict over Tourism Projects in Bali, Indonesia*, Sophie Strauß, PhD candidate at MLU Halle-Wittenberg, explored how on the island which has been developed as a mass tourism destination for more than 40 years now, environmental jargon and the global sustainability trend is nowadays used as strategical arguments both for and against the development of natural sites so far excluded from tourism. Her talk was based on her one-year empirical research in Bali.

Dr. Carsten Wergin, MLU Halle-Wittenberg, then gave a presentation based on his recent fieldwork in Rodrigue Island: *After the Fish are Gone: Re-Evaluating Biodiversity for Tourism Development, Rodrigue Island, Mauritius*. He analyzed the efforts of the government of Mauritius and regional, national and international organizations to preserve and restore the biodiversity on the Mauritian dependency while at the same time developing tourism in order to give local inhabitants a livelihood based on sustainable tourism. Drawing on film and interview material, Wergin showed the complexities of how the different actors involved attempt to recreate biodiversity for tourism promotion and how this process affects and reshapes local, regional and national identity and culture. All four presentations revealed forms of local appropriations of terms from the global discourse of sustainability (either relating to natural resources or to cultural heritage and benefits for so-called traditional communities) by a variety of actors and how they are determined by power relations between the local and the national or international level.

In the final panel of our workshop, Dr. Eva Youkhana, Senior Researcher at the Interdisciplinary Latin America Centre, Bonn, formerly at the Centre for Development Research (ZEF), Bonn, gave a presentation titled *Gender and the Development of Handicraft Production in Rural Yucatán, Mexico*, based on the fieldwork for her PhD thesis on ecotourism in the village of Yaxuná, Rural Mexico (Youkhana 2007).

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In her talk she showed how a development project for improved artisan production in a Mayan community induced transformation processes, especially concerning traditional gender roles in the village by making craftworks the most dynamic rural economy. She focused on the relationship between project executors and peasant artisan women and described processes of inclusion and exclusion that arose during project implementation. By describing the interface between the care and commodity economies, Youkhana showed how the gendered division of labor was partly overcome, and how new dependencies arose simultaneously. Furthermore, she pointed out in which way development projects are accompanied by resource capture of powerful interest groups. She described how the national tourism industry is taking advantage of segments of the population to construct 'Mexican identity', and argued that the 'artinisation' of the rural indigenous population is a poor substitute for their integration into the national economy, within which women's perspective turns out to be exploited in many ways.

Dr. Noel B. Salazar, University of Leuven, Belgium, showed in the last talk of the workshop *On Safari: Imagineering Sustainability in the 'Garden of Eden', Tanzania and beyond* how tourism promotion makes use of tourists' perceptions of traditional culture, untouched nature and wilderness and local communities in order to create images of paradisaical tourism destinations, exemplified by the case of Tanzania and many others. He showed how in the global tourism business the same mechanisms work to attract tourists of different regions by localizing and traditionalizing local communities at the same time. He argued that the concept of community today widely used for forms of sustainable tourism still makes use of the image of the "Exotic Other" and fixes communities to these images in order to use them for "sustainable" or "community-centered" projects.

All speakers of our workshop showed high awareness of the complexities of actors and interests involved in the negotiations over "sustainable" or "community-based" tourism development. In many presentations, the analysis of the power relations on local, national and international levels involved in tourism planning and implementation revealed how "sustainability" turns into a form of ideology used strategically as a tool for or against tourism development by involved groups like NGOs, state institutions, international experts and various parts of the local communities. The case studies exemplified these complexities vividly and in that showed a remarkable scale of parallels. The complexities of the cases leave little room for simplifications like tourism (mass tourism or tourism in the guise of sustainable development) as the destroying phenomenon forced upon "traditional" communities and threatened ecosystems. Most speakers took a critical stance focused on the creation of images and the impacts and appropriation of global trends on the local level that has to be analyzed in particular cases. One main point of debate in the end was the issue of the consequences for the critical tourist, if it turns out that the promise of "moral" travel in most cases is too complex an issue to be true.

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