

Ecotourism Landscapes: An Editorial

Adedeji Joseph Adeniran, Fadamiro Joseph Akinlabi*

Department of Architecture, The Federal University of Technology, Akure, Nigeria

Abstract This special issue of *American Journal of Tourism Management* is about the significance of ecotourism landscapes as important components of the urban and sub-urban grain in developing nations. Identifying this fact, the papers document the characteristics, tourists' experiences and means of continual conservation of the landscapes studied towards enhancing their tourism values. While the papers presented centres on the potentials of these landscapes, they have a common aim at ensuring that tourists and potential tourists are focused as being central to the successful management of tourism industry. Essentially, the landscapes studied are either parks or gardens or cultural/historical sites in different contexts. This editorial sets out the overall scope of the special issue and considers the relationship between ecotourism landscapes and tourists satisfaction literature. It then outlines and summarizes some key points as well as commenting on each paper. It concludes by asserting that ecotourism landscapes are germane to the overall success of the ecological conservation movement and upholding the indigenous value-system of the local communities, with numerous social, economic and cultural benefits.

Keywords Culture, Ecotourists, Landscapes, Satisfaction, Nature

1. Introduction

Ecotourism typically involves travel to destinations where flora, fauna, and cultural heritage are the primary attractions. It is intended to offer tourists insight into the impact of human beings on the environment, and to foster a greater appreciation of natural habitats. Ecotourism was first defined as:

“....travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals,

as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas.”[1,2,3].

A more widely accepted version was given by Ziffer[4] :

“Ecotourism: a form of tourism inspired primarily by the natural history of an area, including its indigenous cultures. The Ecotourists visits relatively undeveloped areas in the spirit of appreciation, participation and sensitivity. The ecotourists practice a non-consumptive use of wildlife and natural resources and contributes to the visited area through labour or financial means aimed at directly benefiting the conservation of the site and the economic wellbeing of the local residents”

According to Sebahat, Sevgi and Nilgöl[5]:

“Ecotourism is an important instrument used for

contribution to preservation of the natural landscape and offers a solution to the poverty problem commonplace in underdeveloped regions. In addition, it produces a structure utility for the economic development and political progress of the local population, providing a resource for training of the visitors and for preservation”.

It is also a form of sustainable tourism[6,7]. Furthermore, the multi-layered significance of ecotourism landscapes as green infrastructures, ecological conservation, and cultural heritages and importantly as tourism sites cannot be overemphasized. Since the aim of best tourism management is to optimize patronage and afford tourists satisfaction with minimal environmental impacts there is need for focused studies of ecotourism landscapes in urban and sub-urban contexts, restoring and conserving natural landscapes, environmental impacts of ecotourism, philosophies, theories and concepts of ecotourism, ecotourism satisfaction indices, managing national parks, cultural heritage landscapes and ecotourism interface, eco-biodiversity, eco-sites as urban green infrastructures, ecotourism best practices, biodiversity conservation and management and cultural diffusion through ecotourism.

While these are wide areas of study, this special issue of *American Journal of Tourism Management* is about the significance of ecotourism landscapes as important components of the urban and sub-urban grain in developing nations. Identifying this fact, the papers document the characteristics, tourists' experiences and means of continual conservation of the landscapes studied towards enhancing their tourism values. While the papers presented centre on the potentials of these landscapes, they have a common aim

* Corresponding author:

joechrisdamiro@yahoo.com (Fadamiro, Joseph Akinlabi)

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2. Ecotourism Landscapes and Tourists' Satisfaction

Two components are central to ecotourism: the landscape and the people. Accordingly, Kusler[8] (1991) argues that ecotourism must have a strong "people element" and therefore, ecotourism establishes a harmonious symbiotic relationship between sightseeing visit and environmental protection[9]. Torres-Sovero et al[10] (2012) analyzed the factors that influence visitor satisfaction in nature tourism and argue that they are critical for the appropriate management of tourism, particularly in nature tourism enterprises like ecotourism which contributes to biodiversity conservation and the development of local people. These factors were found to be socio-economic and ecological variables, as well as tourist-operation related factors and cultural features.

Satisfied Ecotourists bring success to the businesses[11]. Furthermore, Yooshik and Muzaffer[12 in13] argues that satisfaction play an important role in planning marketable tourism products and services. Thus, the tourist satisfaction is important to successful destination marketing because it influences the choice of destination, the consumption of products and services, and the decision to return[13,14].

These tourist satisfaction variables are central to the ecotourism industry. According to Newsome et al.[15]:

"Ecotourism" can be understood in terms of 5 fundamental characteristics: It is based on the natural environment; Ecologically sustainable; Environmentally educative (Enjoyable and meaningful experiences, Knowledge and awareness, Expectations of ecotourists); Locally beneficial (Support, services and products (local employment),) Tourist satisfaction (Quality, safety and business Viability)".

This last characteristic summarizes the whole characteristics. Furthermore, Reynolds and Braithwie[16] claimed that ecotourists' satisfaction is influenced by physical attributes including tangible and intangible factors of the tourism site including facilities, design and weather. Wight[17] found that the guide's ability and/or interpretation and eco-experience programs are important factors for satisfaction. Testing tourists' satisfaction with an expectation-disconfirmation paradigm, Pizam and Riechel [18] discovered that Ecotourists' satisfaction was influenced by physical and biological characteristics, as well as accessibility and usability of the sites. The presence of animals and plants has also been evaluated as important factors for Ecotourists' satisfaction[19].

Actual and intension to recommend ecotourism landscapes and revisits are measures of tourists' satisfaction [20, 21]. This centrality of people is also evident in the goals of ecotourism to bring benefits to local people and protect the natural and cultural heritage upon which the tourism is founded. Therefore, for utmost tourists' satisfaction, the ecotourism landscape should be relatively untouched and physically accessible[22]. On the cultural determinants of Ecotourists' satisfaction, Tigu and Tuclea[23] found these to include cultural and moral values of tourists, cultural and moral values of local community, tourist individual behaviour and group behaviour and characteristics[24].

Tourists' satisfaction towards ecotourism can be measured by using the various approaches. It can be determined by subjective and objective approaches[25]. The methodological models include: Simalto(Simultaneous multi-attribute level trade-off) Grid Approach[26] for eliciting customer feedback on the relative "worth" of product features; Service Quality (SERVQUAL) Approach [27] developed to assess customer perceptions of service quality; Gap analysis[28] in which service quality is a function of the differences between expectation and performance along the quality dimensions. Others are: Expectancy Disconfirmation Model[29] in which Disconfirmation happens when there are discrepancies between initial expectations and actual performance that lead to satisfaction or dissatisfaction among tourists; Perceived Service Quality and Satisfaction Model[30] which attempts to enhance the understanding of the ecotourism constructs [31]. The papers in this special issue have employed various mixes of these methodological approaches.

3. The Papers

Four papers from developing nations featured in this issue. Three were written on Ghana, Malaysia and Nigeria while the fourth is on ecotourism infrastructure generally. Arowosafe and Emmanuel investigated the indicators for tourist satisfaction at Mole National Park, Ghana. They argued that tourist satisfaction with particular tourist attractions is manifested in various ways and may be influenced by possible prior experience or lack of it. Their study aim at discovering the indicators which included actual satisfaction level, likelihood of revisit, probability of inviting others to same park and reasons for possible revisit. They discovered that the greatest percentage of tourists were young and unmarried and would be willing to repeat their visit and invite others to the park. Their methodological approach was both objective and subjective using questionnaire instrument. They recommended improved advertisement and sensitization of citizens and foreigners at large and include provision of games which attract the youthful population and the introduction of other activities to sustain or improve tourists' level of satisfaction with the park. Their study also brought management policy challenges to the government of Ghana and other countries in the West

African sub-region. The strength of the paper lies in its “people-centrality” and the balanced mix of the flora and fauna of the park investigated.

Mohamad Saleh and Nik Hasan analysed the “Coral Reef Conservation Awareness Among Stakeholders in Perhentian Island” of Malaysia. The study is very significant to the debate on the impact of ecotourism to nature conservation to ecotourism landscapes. With a balanced survey of the principal stakeholders to the Island, the authors discovered that a difference in the level of awareness among stakeholders, with the Besut District Department of Marine Parks (Terengganu) staff having the highest level of awareness, on eco-touristic activities that threaten coral reefs and the issue of coral reef bleaching. The three groups of stakeholders showed high level of awareness on the importance of coral reefs conservation activities in the Island, unfortunately, results suggest majority of them were uncertain about their involvement in conservation efforts due to conflict of interest between economic empowerment and their aim towards sustainability of coral reefs. The study also shows that “educational background and interests towards the tourism industry were important factors influencing the awareness level of stakeholders.” An important strength of the paper lies in its detailed guidance for future researches on the subject issue. It highlights that other stakeholders like fishermen and researchers could be involved to allow “comparisons of findings as well as the expansion to the scope of existing studies” and expand the study to other Malaysian islands suffering from serious coral bleaching.

Ecotourism infrastructure is one important aspect of tourism management. These infrastructures facilitate access, minimize impact, ensure visitor safety and enhance visitor satisfaction. This was the concern of the third paper by Adebayo and Iweka on “Optimizing the Sustainability of Tourism Infrastructure in Nigeria through Design for Deconstruction Framework”. The authors argue that “the way in which construction of tourism infrastructure, particularly buildings, public amenities, roads, parking, street furniture, etc. are currently designed in most countries is haphazard, wasteful and largely unscientific.” According to them the design implications of life expectancy of tourism infrastructure should include the negative environmental impacts of wastages associated with them. They posited that the present experience of the industrialized countries and the construction activities inherent in tourism infrastructure associated with huge amount of waste suggest the need for new approaches. The review therefore centres on the framework of design for deconstruction as a paradigm in infrastructural design and construction for sustainability. It argues that “application of design for deconstruction framework in design of tourism infrastructure will enhance and broaden the existing knowledge of sustainable design and construction of infrastructure in the 21st century Nigeria.”

The fourth paper by Fadamiro and Adedeji on “Place and

Memory: An Evaluation of Tourism Potentials of Selected Cultural Landscapes In Ile-Ife, Nigeria” showcases the significance of a great blend of landscape, culture, history, tourism potential, spirit of place and ecotourism in urban context. Three cultural ecotourism landscapes were selected for the study. These are Oranmiyan Staff and site which is ancestral, Oke Mogun which is cultural and religious, and Oke Yidi battle ground which is socio-spatial. The three places were investigated with “the aim of identifying their characteristic ‘memory spirit’ towards their promotion as valuable tourism centres.” Both positive and negative variables on memories gleaned from the literature were administered and descriptive and inferential results show that “the landscapes are soaked with different memories” and “significant correlation between place and memory” was discovered. The paper is unique on its merit of detail statistical analyses. The study concludes with recommendation and asserts that “the pains and pleasures memorably associated with these three landscapes could be turned into gains through tourism promotion strategies.”

4. Conclusions

It is a great delight to serve as Guest Editors for this special issue. Indeed we are overwhelmed with the dedication and patience of the authors with the whole process of a dozen calendar months and the sacrificial service of the erudite Professors that carried out the double blind peer-review of the papers. We also hope that these papers will serve important value of being the basis of future studies on the numerous yet-to be explored ecotourism landscapes of the developing nations. On the whole the place of ecotourism in urban and sub-urban policy formulation cannot be over-emphasized.

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