WASTED VISITS? ECOTOURISM IN THEORY VS. PRACTICE, AT TORTUGUERO, COSTA RICA

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Environment in the Graduate School of Duke University

2007
ABSTRACT
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Abstract

In this dissertation, I contemplate ecotourism in theory and in practice. I use the case study of a solid waste crisis (2002-2004) in Tortuguero, Costa Rica, a turtle tourism destination, to explore: the consumptive nature of ecotourism, tourist perceptions of the environment, ecotourism aesthetics, local resistance to ecotourism development, local perceptions of ecotourism’s environmental impacts, and the future of ecotourism. I used mixed methods including participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and on-site surveys to collect data. I conducted mainly qualitative analysis (thematic coding; adapted grounded theory) influenced by political ecology, environmental justice, resistance studies, tourism studies, and the geography of tourism. My use of environmental justice concepts to frame the solid waste crisis in Tortuguero, and the application of key concepts from Scott’s (1981) Weapons of the Weak to local behavior and narratives both represent fairly novel applications in an ecotourism context. I attempted to move beyond a restricted case study by emphasizing characteristics shared between Tortuguero and other sites, in the hopes of contributing towards efforts to inject new theoretical applications into tourism studies. This case study reveals the consumptive side of ecotourism, and the analysis of tourist survey responses highlights the central role of aesthetics in ecotourism. This project challenges simplistic portrayals of ecotourism as ‘benevolent and benign’ (e.g. by highlighting its consumptive impacts and
related injustices), and of ecotourists as more aware and altruistic than mass tourists (e.g. by presenting a heterogeneous group of respondents who none the less, stress aesthetics). It updates existing literature on Tortuguero by presenting data on tourist and local perceptions of Tortuguero, and by suggesting explanations for divergent perceptions of the park’s role in ecotourism, for example. The evidence that I present of local resistance and waste-related injustices suggest that despite its high profile reputation, multimillion dollar annual revenues, improved local standards of living, and green turtle conservation successes, critical details and key voices have largely been ‘left out of the story of ecotourism in Tortuguero’. I hope that this study contributes to encouraging the culture of ‘greater ecotourism realism’ that is needed in order to move forward.
Dedication

For the people of Tortuguero, my family and friends (it takes a village)
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Introduction

Although there is no universally agreed upon definition for ecotourism¹, it is generally viewed as a form of nature-based tourism meant to both reduce negative environmental impacts and to benefit the host community more than conventional tourism or mass tourism. It is a form of ‘new tourism’ or alternative tourism that was once put forward as a ‘smokeless industry’; a form of development that could lead to conservation and community support for it through making ‘nature pay for itself’ and thus providing revenues and jobs for communities in environments worth conserving (Weaver 2001; Boo 1990; Cater 2002). When ecotourism was first introduced, the main impetus was wildlife conservation in areas with special conservation features such as biodiversity ‘hotspots’ or species of significance (e.g. The ‘big five’ in Africa) (Hill, Nel, and Trotter 2006). Ecotourism’s roots in the international conservation movement are reflected in the fact that one of its most cited documents is Elizabeth Boo’s 1990 report written for the WWF (Boo 1990). In early days, ecotourism seemed like a panacea- a way to satisfy both conservation and development needs and to get local people ‘on

¹ Ecotourism can be defined as “environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features - both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations” (Ceballos-Lascuráin 1993a, cited in Ceballos-Lascuráin 1996, 20).
board’, and thus increase the likelihood of long-term success (Hvenegaard and Dearden 1998; Weaver 2001).

Ecotourism arose out of an international conservation agenda, but it was also a response to some of the environmental ills associated with mass tourism (Weaver 1998). Ecotourism was supposed to be a better form of tourism that aimed to minimize tourism’s impact on the environment, contribute to conservation and provide a form of local development. From about the mid 1990s onwards, it became clear that in some cases, conservation was dominating ecotourism projects, that people were often a distant second concern, and that this seemed to be leading some projects to fail (Wall 1996; Weaver 1999; Weaver 1998; Liu 2003; Lindberg, Enriquez, and Sproule 1996). In response, scholars, NGOs and other actors began to expand upon original definitions to include more of a focus on the communities involved, suggesting that intangible benefits for local communities, such as empowerment and participation be included among ecotourism’s goals (Scheyvens 1999; Place 1991). At the same time, there was mounting case study evidence that ecotourism sites were struggling to deal with their own sets of undesirable environmental impacts suggesting that ecotourism was not impact-free after all. In fact, some scholars have argued that for various reasons, ecotourism destinations might be at greater risk for negative impacts and/or less able adequately deal with such impacts (Wheeler 1992, 1994; Kuniyal 2005; Pleumarom 1999; Brown et al. 1997). All of
this raised new concerns about the differences between ecotourism in theory and in practice.

While some successes have been achieved through ecotourism, ‘pro-poor’ activists and critical ecotourism scholars argue that ecotourism’s original conservation-centered roots persist and that it remains a largely bio-centric (animals over people) endeavor in many places, placing conservation priorities ahead of local benefits (Ross and Wall 1999b; Hill, Nel, and Trotter 2006). By now, the literature is replete with the shortcomings of ecotourism in practice, many of which can be linked to biocentrism or ‘species-centrism’ and/or profit-centrism in planning and management (Ross and Wall 1999b; Scheyvens 2002).

In the hopes of adding to ecotourism-related scholarship, this dissertation uses the case study of Tortuguero and its solid waste management crisis2 (2002-2004) to contemplate some of the challenges of ecotourism in practice. It focuses in on the experiences of locally-living people and visiting tourists to Tortuguero during an obvious time of environmental management crisis (trash on the landscape) and contemplates how the management challenges that they experience and their

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2 This dissertation deals only with solid waste (garbage, litter) management issues in Tortuguero, it does not address liquid waste/sewage issues in Tortuguero. Both the terms ‘the solid waste crisis’ and ‘the waste crisis’ are used, but both refer to solid waste ONLY. The term crisis is used to represent the extreme difficulties that Tortuguero was having in 2002-2004 which repeatedly resulted in plant closings and other conflicts.
perceptions of these are linked to ecotourism as a form of development both in theory and in practice. As will be explained in greater detail within the chapters, this project draws upon the literatures on tourism, consumption, political ecology, environmental justice; and resistance.

**Objectives**

The four main objectives of this dissertation are:

1. *To contribute to an improved theoretical understanding of ecotourism;*

2. *To contribute to a more holistic understanding of the impacts of ecotourism including considering waste management as more than a technical environmental problem;*

3. *To present voices from the locally-lived experience of ecotourism; and*

4. *To further our understanding of the ecotourist and ecotourism aesthetics.*

**1. To contribute to an improved theoretical understanding of ecotourism**

Tourism studies have been broadly critiqued as lacking theoretical rigor, and critics have emphasized the need for greater integration of theory into tourism case studies (Jennings 2001; Pearce and Butler 1993). These concerns apply to ecotourism as well; West et al. (2003) and Campbell et al. (2007) argue that without improved theoretical understanding, we will keep ‘rediscovering’ the disappointments of ecotourism in practice. In response to these critiques, a key objective in this dissertation is to bring existing social theory to the analysis of ecotourism in Tortuguero, Costa Rica.
Through improved theoretical understanding of ecotourism in this specific case, more broadly applicable conclusions can be made to help interrogate ecotourism in general and at other similar sites.

In the first chapter, we incorporate theories of consumption to remind readers that the common practice of labeling ecotourism ‘non-consumptive’ creates false hopes about it being ‘no impact’ and ignores the important work on theorizing tourism as consumption, as well as an extensive case study literature that details the cumulative impacts (good and bad) of ecotourism to date. We point out the flaws and dangers in using this label, both for people and environments, and call for a re-envisioning of ecotourism that would recognize its consumptive nature and also the possibilities of including (sustainable) consumptive use of animals and plants among ecotourism-appropriate activities (e.g. incorporating local wild foodstuffs into eco-tours).

In the second chapter, we use theorizing about the tourist ‘gaze’ to better understand respondent perceptions of Tortuguero specifically. Their perceptions are somewhat contradictory; while they reinforce the importance of the gaze (i.e. the gaze must be catered to in order to provide satisfactory tourism experiences), they also suggest that ecotourists can be tolerant of some visual impacts (e.g. trash on the

3 I use the term ‘we’ throughout this thesis in order to recognize Dr. Lisa Campbell’s guidance and her co-authorship on resulting papers. Please see the section entitled ‘structure and voice’ for further details.
landscape in Tortuguero). While respondents noticed the trash, disruptions to the gaze did not seem to detract from overall enjoyment of the experience. These results raise interesting questions about the gaze, ecotourism, and the ecotourist, all of which are explored in Chapter 2.

In the third chapter, we incorporate resistance theory as a possible explanation for patterns of statements and behaviors by locally-living people observed and recorded in Tortuguero. We illustrate how applying different kinds of theory to an ecotourism case study can illuminate previously underreported elements of local experiences with ecotourism, and suggest ways to improve these.

In the fourth chapter, we focus specifically on the solid waste crisis in Tortuguero. We move beyond a technical (e.g. concerned with the environmental impacts of waste and how these might be reduced) and managerial (e.g. concerned with the management structures at fault or that might address the problem) framing of the waste crisis. Instead, we use environmental justice to frame the solid waste crisis in Tortuguero, which allows us to situate the waste crisis in a larger context (e.g. of political, social, and technical marginality; distance from networks of support) that might apply to other similarly remote ecotourism destinations in the Global South. Therefore, in every chapter, there is an effort to combine empirical data from the case study with broader concepts and theories, thus creating the potential for comparisons
with other case studies and for learning about patterns in ecotourism successes and
shortcomings.

2. To contribute to a more holistic understanding of the impacts of tourism
including considering waste management as more than a technical
environmental problem

In conventional evaluations of ecotourism destinations or programs, it is
common practice to separate the impacts of ecotourism into seemingly distinct
categories such as social, economic, and environmental (see for example, frameworks for
assessing ecotourism by Ross and Wall (1999a; 1999b) and Scheyvens (1999)). One of
the goals of this dissertation is to complicate these artificial separations by revealing the
complex relationships between them. In this dissertation, solid waste is not simply
presented as an environmental impact but rather as a multi-faceted impact; an
environmental impact caused by a combination of social, economic, and political factors
and resulting in a myriad of secondary impacts (e.g. aesthetic; social; economic).
Furthermore, the focus on waste-related impacts is no accident; despite the fact that
many ecotourism destinations are currently dealing with waste management problems
(Young 1999; Brown et al. 1997; Kuniyal 2005; Thrupp 1990), solid waste management
challenges are typically under-represented in the literature, with waste and sewage
being afforded a few sentences in most case studies. Given that waste-related impacts
have the capacity to sabotage the ecotourism aesthetic and environmental quality on
many levels and thus place tourism at risk, we find the minimal treatment received surprising. In Evans’s summary of ecotourism in Tortuguero, for example, he devotes only one line to waste: “With the millions of tourist dollars have come problems with sewage disposal, waste management, and inadequately regulated zoning” (Evans 1999, 229).

This dissertation seeks to illustrate the ways in which waste is not just an environmental impact but rather includes social, political, cultural, technical, aesthetic, and economic aspects as well. In Chapter 1, we point out that the undesirable solid waste-related impacts of ecotourism are common and are the results of tourists consuming the landscape and consuming in the landscape, providing evidence that waste impacts alone belie the fact that ecotourism is ‘non consumptive’. Chapter 2 considers the aesthetic risks associated with waste and management failures on-site. We argue that the aesthetic components of environmental impacts are vastly under-treated, both in applied evaluations and in academic work on ecotourism. We also argue that we must expand our view of undesirable impacts in ecotourism destinations to include tourists, both as part of the problems and potential contributors to solutions. In Chapter 3, we explore the social, cultural, political, and economic impacts of the solid waste crisis on locally-living people. Our results show that what at first might appear to be poor waste management (e.g. burning and burying waste in public spaces) and categorized as a
simple technical problem has social and cultural meanings (e.g. waste burning as protest over a lack of adequate waste management). In both Chapters 3 and 4, we present local perceptions of conservation-driven environmental management at an ecotourism site, and make connections between environmental impacts, and the social contexts in which they occur, and the resulting social impacts that they can create. For example, local respondents voiced fears and concerns that turtle conservation (turtles only) and ecotourism for profit appear to be driving ecotourism, rather than sound environmental management; they question the soundness of these approaches and their potential impacts on the future. The respondents also question potential social impacts of environmental impacts (e.g. when ecotourism comes to ‘save’ the local environment but it brings a lot of development and immigrants to the area). This represents a different local ‘social understanding’ of ecotourism than some of the larger and more abstract evaluations that use Tortuguero as an example of ecotourism ‘success’. Lastly, in Chapter 4, we insist that the waste crisis and others like it are more than just environmental problems, and we highlight links to larger issues of power, ownership, and political voice, making environmental problems political. Although such framings of ecotourism-related environmental problems are common in certain types of literature (e.g. political ecology & the ‘parks and people’ literature), they are not common in much
of the tourism-related literature or the conservation-focused studies of ecotourism in practice.

3. To present voices from the locally-lived experience of ecotourism

Conservation-oriented evaluations of ecotourism destinations often focus on conservation (how well is the local environment or specific target species within it doing?) and/or the economics of ecotourism (e.g. how much revenue is being generated) (e.g. Tisdell and Wilson 2002; Troëng and Drews 2004). This makes sense, particularly for NGOs and other actors that are given scant amounts of time within which to conduct these evaluations, because species and dollars can be counted and such counts produce results-oriented evaluations. It is easy to see why in-depth qualitative data collection is not part of many ecotourism evaluations: it is typically costly and time consuming. In the last fifteen years or so, an increasing number of authors and practitioners have tried to incorporate indicators to measure community empowerment, community wellbeing, and other intangible social elements. They have also called for greater investigation into the distribution of benefits within a community, rather than accepting gross revenue increases as proof that ecotourism ‘is working’ (Scheyvens 2002; Wallace 1996; Ross and Wall 1999a; Johnston 2003; Scheyvens 1999; Zebich-Knos in press). Measurable indicators for intangible social elements are few and will tell only part of the story. We need more qualitative (e.g. ethnographic-style) accounts of the lived experience of
ecotourism, because observing people, talking with them, and listening to them allows us to see the degrees to which ecotourism has affected local life, to see the contradictions in ecotourism in practice, to learn about ecotourism ‘from the inside’, and to ‘evaluate’ ecotourism as a way of life. This can provide important context for ‘dollars and cents’ evaluations and allow us to incorporate the opinions and sentiments of those living with ecotourism. Such work is also critical for ecotourism’s success in the long run because ethnographic data can provide detailed information on elements of local support for ecotourism- ingredients vital to its continuation (Place 1991; Scheyvens 1999).

This dissertation seeks to add to these efforts to ‘look beyond the numbers’ of ecotourism by providing accounts of life with tourism in Tortuguero by those who experience it most intimately: visiting tourists (temporarily) and the people who work and/or live in the village. Chapter 3 in particular draws extensively on the accounts of local people, integrating verbatim quotes from interviews and observations made during 7 months in the village. Data in this chapter were analyzed using adapted grounded theory, to ensure that our presentation of the locally lived experience emerged from local accounts, rather than from our pre-determined expectations of what the lived experience would be. Both chapters 3 and 4 seek to investigate the types of knowledge and information about ecotourism in practice that exist at this micro level, and that are not typically present in more standard evaluations of ecotourism or in the body of
literature about Tortuguero. Thus, this dissertation not only adds to the literature on Tortuguero, complementing and updating existing works, but it also illustrates the need for this type of deeper, ethnographic-style look into the lived experiences of ecotourism, both to better understand the differences between ecotourism in theory and ecotourism in practice, and to improve the latter in locally appropriate and meaningful ways. It also adds more generally to recent efforts at incorporating ethnographic approaches into the study of conservation and development (e.g. Stronza 2000; Sundberg 2004; Walley 2002; Nygren 2003).

4. To further our understanding of the ecotourist and ecotourism aesthetics

   Much of the work on tourists and ecotourists has focused on segregating them into groups and categories based on interests and motivations, activity preferences, and demographics (Gnoth 1997; McMinn and Cater 1998; Pearce and Morcardo 2001; Hvenegaard and Dearden 1998; Weaver and Lawton 2002). In recent works on tourist perceptions of the environment, however, more effort has been made to move beyond such categorizations, to consider the implications of different types of tourist perceptions of the environment for both ecotourism management and the theorized ecotourist (Hillery et al. 2001; Norton 1996; Grosspietsch 2006; Davis 2007; Yagi and Pearce 2007; McCabe and Stokoe 2004).
In this dissertation, we take a slightly different approach to the ecotourist as an identity. We submit that the ecotourist in Tortuguero during the green turtle nesting season, as represented by the respondent sample, is many things at once. We highlight the existence of both patterns of diversity and confluences of responses to argue that categorizing ecotourists misses the point, to a certain degree. All tourists to Tortuguero are ‘ecotourists’ for the purposes of marketing- it is only marketed as such and thus, that is their label ‘in the real world’ of tourism transactions. According to existing tourist typologies (Hvenegaard and Dearden 1998), a variety of tourist types are reflected in the survey responses, both within the larger group as a whole and within individual surveys, suggesting that ecotourists are not easy to categorize at any level. Despite all of this diversity and any changes that may have occurred since tourism in Tortuguero first began, ecotourist interests remain the same: nature and wildlife. It is not surprising therefore that trash disturbs many tourists’ gaze while on site; what is surprising is that respondents remain largely satisfied with their experiences in Tortuguero, despite the obvious aesthetic and potential environmental impacts of waste on the landscape. We consider what this suggests about the tourist gaze, tourist satisfaction, and the aesthetics of ecotourism.

This dissertation includes a dual focus with respect to the tourist: we investigate the ways in which the tourist sees Tortuguero, and we discuss the relationships that
tourists infer (or do not) about who is responsible for problems reflected on the landscape (e.g. the waste crisis). The portrait of the respondents forwarded in this dissertation captures the contradictions inherent in the ecotourist gaze and also raises questions about ecotourism as being altruistic and the ecotourist as being more aware, educated and concerned about environment and culture. Chapter 2 points out, for example, that despite the ‘community-oriented components’ of ecotourism in theory, the survey responses included virtually no concerns about human health or safety regarding trash, and only low levels of reported concerns related to turtle health and trash. It also reveals that despite all of their purported environmental awareness, respondents do not connect themselves to the trash disturbing their gaze. All of this adds layers of information to our current conceptualizations of the ecotourist and speaks to the connections that tourists and locally-living people make (or do not make) between themselves, the industry, and the solid waste crisis, exposing narratives of association and blame that do not seem to extend to the tourist in either case (Chapter 4).

**Why Tortuguero?**

As will be detailed in various chapters, Tortuguero is an ideal study site for the four objectives listed. It is a popular ecotourism destination in which conservation successes have been reported (Bjorndal et al. 1999; Bjorndal 1998; Troëng and Drews 2004; Troëng 2004) and local people now make their living from ecotourism. It is an
older ecotourism site (now more than 20 years old) in a remote location of a premier
‘nature-based tourism’ destination: Costa Rica (Evans 1999; Weaver 1999). While Costa
Rica incorporates other forms of tourism such as cruise tourism and resort tourism, its
strongest reputation is one associated with nature-based tourism and green tourism.
Within Costa Rica, Tortuguero is one of the oldest national parks (1975), and the park
system, including Tortuguero, plays a pivotal role in ecotourism to the country.
Tortuguero is also an appropriate choice because little is known (or has been recorded)
about the ‘lived experiences’ (Valentine 2007) of ecotourism, despite everything else that
has been written about it.

Tortuguero is also often upheld as an example of successful ecotourism that
benefits both turtles and people (Smith 2005; Troëng and Drews 2004). Furthermore, its
tourism is park-based, which many ecotourism-based destinations in the Global South
are, and ecotourism was initiated as a replacement economy after a series of extractive
resource-based economies including commercial turtling- collapsed. The latter activity
is seen as an anathema to many turtle conservationists around the world, yet it is one
that also has smaller scale subsistence and cultural ties to the founding local community
of Tortuguero (e.g. Black settlers made ‘run down stew’ with turtle meat and used turtle
eggs for baking) (Campbell 1999, 2002b, 2002a, 2002c; Lefever 1992). Finally, Tortuguero
has experienced rapid growth in tourism numbers in the last twenty years, with an
estimated 80,000 tourists a year now and only 850 estimated permanent residents (Jarquin and Gayle 2004; Place 1991; de Haro and Tröeng 2006). Tortuguero therefore deals with problems shared by many popular destinations in remote locations throughout the Global South (Weaver 1998; Mowforth and Munt 1998).

Another advantage in choosing Tortuguero is that there has already been much written about it both as an important site for turtle conservation (e.g. Bjorndal 1998; Troëng 2004; Troëng and Rankin 2005), and as an ecotourism destination (e.g. Jacobson and Robles 1992; Lee and Snepenger 1992; Place 1995; Barrera 2003; Campbell 2003, 2002b; Peskin 2002; Nature Air 2001-2007). However, much of this work is now outdated and several of the seminal publications on life in Tortuguero occurred before ecotourism took off (e.g. Place 1991; Lefever 1992). In this respect, the goal of this project is to add (e.g. local voices and tourist perceptions; theoretical re-framings) to the existing literature in a complementary way, in the hopes of adding to our understanding of the ‘experiment of ecotourism’ as it continues to unfold in Tortuguero. The focus on the solid waste crisis in Tortuguero is also somewhat unique, as little has been written about it to date. In summaries of tourism in Tortuguero, it is typically included in a phrase or two, but no one has explored the significance of the crisis as an example of: 1) how ‘successful ecotourism’ does not necessarily guarantee or manage for reduced overall negative environmental impacts (it might in fact be species-centric as this case study
suggests), and 2) how despite its claims to be more benign and any benefits it might create in practice, ecotourism can also end up producing unfair/unjust situations for those living with it (the waste burden and associated conflicts and costs in this case).

**Methods**

The case study is a common tool in tourism-related research (e.g. Lopez-Espinosa de los Monteros 2002; Farrell and Marion 2001; Ross and Wall 1999b; Archabald and Naughton-Treves 2001; Stern et al. 2003). It provides a way to collect and present detailed information on small scale or day-to-day tourism in practice at the local level, while also providing examples of phenomena that can be linked to regional, national, and global scales. In the presentation of many tourism case studies, however, much tends to be ‘glossed over’ in terms of the people who actually experience it: the people who live and work there, and the people who visit the place (e.g. in using Doxey 1975 for analysis, local responses to tourism development are merely categorized). Data on local perceptions of ecotourism, if collected, tend to be limited to surveys that do not provide detailed insight into how people feel about ecotourism-related changes (Wall 1996). Furthermore, ecotourism cases studies are commonly presented using evaluation schemes or frameworks, allowing little room for local voices or tourist perceptions to indicate which evaluation criteria are meaningful to them (e.g. Ross and Wall 1999b,
1999a). Similarly, tourists are often reduced to typologies and their opinions are seldom included in evaluations of ecotourism sites (e.g. Hvenegaard and Dearden 1998).

This project includes an empirical component (collected data on the solid waste crisis in Tortuguero), but it also includes larger goals. These are: 1) to add information about the ground level lived experience of ecotourism as expressed by tourist and local voices, and 2) to move beyond the technical aspects of the waste crisis and Tortuguero as a case study, towards theoretical conceptualizations of ecotourism in practice. As such, this project demanded an interpretative social science approach grounded in human geography of the environment (e.g. political ecology).

I employed mixed methods in data collection. This included conducting a literature review and undertaking fieldwork. My fieldwork included approximately seven months of participant observation in Tortuguero: two short visits (2002; 2004) and two longer field seasons (2003; 2004). I also conducted over seventy interviews with people who work and/or live in the village and conducted 1001 surveys with visiting tourists. ⁴ The ethnographic nature of the overall research project and the fact that it occurred during two consecutive field seasons constitutes somewhat of a different approach, however. While tourism scholars have been incorporating more in-depth

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⁴ The surveys and interviews received ethics review board approval at The University of Western Ontario and Duke University.
ethnographic methodology recently, it remains somewhat on the fringes (Riley and Love 2000) despite compelling qualitative works that have been produced in recent years (e.g. Stronza 2000). The rationale for using a more involved qualitative data collection approach over two years was that it would better allow me to get at the ‘lived experience’ (Valentine 2007) of ecotourism that is underrepresented in the literature and thus, little understood.

Therefore, this project includes both a (mostly qualitative) analysis of empirical data and a theoretical component; further details on methods are presented in the individual chapters. Even the choice of theory arose from the data, however—both environmental justice and resistance emerged from the data themselves, during data entry and analysis, and were not among original theoretical influences in the original proposal writing stages of this project. At the project’s core is a focus on voices and untold elements of the ecotourism story. Therefore, thematic coding of the data followed by mapping of relationships between themes and sub-themes within respondent answers, using adapted grounded theory (using QSR NVivo software), was an important part of distilling the narratives and patterns in these voices. As such, this project does not provide in-depth quantitative analysis but is rather meant to complement existing quantifications of the local industry by showcasing alternative forms of information about ecotourism in Tortuguero: textual expressions about what
ecotourism looks like ‘on the ground’. I decided to write chapters that included both theory and empirical data and to bind them together in a manuscript style dissertation in order to facilitate the integration of new theoretical considerations into ‘what we know about Tortuguero’ and, in doing this, add an example of this type of combination to the literature, heeding calls for such work from tourism scholars (Jamal 2001; Riley and Love 2000; Pearce and Butler 1993).

This dissertation uses the case study of a solid waste management crisis in Tortuguero, Costa Rica, to explore as-of-yet under-represented or unrepresented components of ecotourism development. The idea in writing this dissertation was to use an aging successful study site such as Tortuguero because of its reputation and its existing literature, but also to attempt to add something new to our understanding of ecotourism through focusing on elements of ecotourism development in Tortuguero that are typically ignored (e.g. What do the tourists think?) and by incorporating innovative injections of theory from outside the field of tourism studies. Further contributions in this dissertation lie in its efforts to introduce new theoretical framings to the case of ecotourism in Tortuguero (resistance-related theory; environmental justice-related concepts). Importantly, this dissertation does not call for an abandonment of ecotourism, but rather for efforts to re-conceptualize ecotourism both in theory and in practice.
Structure and voice

This is a ‘manuscript style’ dissertation; the introduction, conclusion and the main objectives and themes stressed in these tie together four chapters written as separate papers. This format was chosen in order to create the appropriate space and freedom for presenting empirical data and incorporating various theoretical framings stemming from different fields and bodies of literature (e.g. consumption studies; resistance studies; environmental justice).

The data collection, analysis, and theorizing in this dissertation are the result of my own work. The personal pronoun ‘we’ is used throughout most of this dissertation, however, to reflect Dr. Lisa Campbell’s role as second author on papers that we hope to publish from this manuscript style dissertation. Chapter 1 has already been published (Meletis and Campbell 2007) and Chapter 4 is currently under review for publication.

Chapter 1 is a theoretical paper on ecotourism as a form of consumption. In it, we interrogate the binary opposition often used to distinguish ecotourism (called non-consumptive) from consumptive use (e.g. hunting). We draw upon existing ecotourism-related literature (particularly as it relates to wildlife and conservation) and consumption-related theory to argue that ecotourism must be re-conceptualized as: 1) a form of consumption, 2) a consumptive use of the environment, 3) an industry not inherently incompatible with direct consumption of animals or plants, and 4) not
necessarily more sustainable than direct consumptive use. Based on the literature and our own research, we argue that labeling ecotourism ‘non-consumptive’ is not only inaccurate, but also has consequences for both environments and people. We propose a re-conceptualization of ecotourism that could conceptually include sustainable consumptive use, allowing for a greater incorporation of cultural possibilities. This chapter addresses the first and the second objectives of this dissertation, through calling for a re-conceptualization of ecotourism and the ecotourist and introducing reminders about existing social theory than can help us to better understand ecotourism.

Chapter 2 combines both empirical results about the 1001 tourist respondents surveyed (2003; 2004) and theory on the aesthetics of ecotourism and the tourist gaze. In this chapter, we begin with a review of the importance of aesthetics in ecotourism and the potential that tourism impacts have to disrupt the gaze. Our results presented here provide a current (non-random) sample of visiting tourist demographics, interests, and motivations during the busiest tourist months of the green turtle nesting period. Our results fit with existing literature (e.g. nature, wildlife, and the park dominate as interests) but also deviate from other ecotourism studies (e.g. retirees do not feature prominently in our sample). In this chapter, we also provide quantifications and representative quotations of tourist perceptions of the beach, the village, the park, and tourism in Tortuguero. We highlight the contradictions evident in our data, such as the
interests in nature and wildlife but the failure to make connections between tourism, the park, and the solid waste crisis. We use such contradictions within the responses to ‘complicate’ the ‘ecotourist profile’, to challenge assumptions about the ecotourist, and to suggest that ecotourism sets up unfair aesthetic expectations for isolated developing world destinations such as Tortuguero. In doing all of this, we address objectives 1, 2 and 4.

Chapter 3 reflects our efforts to depart from meta-level analyses of ecotourism and to get at ‘living with ecotourism’. We begin this chapter with a review of a condensed history of Tortuguero both before and after the advent of ecotourism. This includes details regarding its reputation as an ecotourism success, which can be distilled into four parts of ‘the official story of ecotourism in Tortuguero’: i. Tortuguero as an eco-success; ii. Tortuguero as a tourism development success; iii. Tortuguero residents as recognizing via ecotourism that a turtle is ‘worth more alive than dead’, and that iv. Tortuguero as a (unified, homogenous) community that is participating in decision-making. In this chapter, we also present qualitative analysis of the semi-structured interviews that I conducted (see Appendix B for interview guide) and we posit that the major themes that emerged from this analysis as an ‘alternative story of ecotourism in Tortuguero’, one that both converges and diverges with ‘the official story of ecotourism in Tortuguero’. These alternative narratives (parts of the story) are examples of the
types of information that cannot be extracted using more conventional ecotourism evaluations or case study formats. We suggest that despite Tortuguero’s success and relative prosperity, resistance to certain aspects of the local ecotourism industry exists in Tortuguero, and complicates its existing reputation as a community that has ‘been converted’ to ecotourism. Our interpretation of the data as including resistance and the existence of an ‘alternative story’ draws upon resistance-related scholarship, particularly that of Scott (1985). This interpretation addresses objectives 1, 2 and 3 of this dissertation.

In Chapter 4, we address the solid waste crisis in Tortuguero in a novel way; we frame it using concepts from Environmental Justice (EJ), a body of literature not typically associated with ecotourism. We argue that the solid waste crisis in Tortuguero fits within the recent expansion of EJ into international places and unconventional environmental scenarios. Using the history of the waste crisis in Tortuguero and local discourse about it as well as EJ concepts, we argue that Tortuguero’s waste crisis and other cases like it are similar to more conventional EJ conflicts in that: i. the siting of the land use/facility (ecotourism) is strategic - communities and places are chosen for specific geographic, political and economic reasons; ii. the brunt of undesirable impacts are borne by the community, the community gets little assistance in dealing with them, and it is primarily others who reap the bulk of the associated benefits; iii. impacts are
often imported without community consent; iv. the local discourse often treats such impacts as unfair and unjust, framing them using ‘us vs. them’ language; v. the affected communities often face political, economic, and social challenges in demanding compensation, reparations, or assistance with respect to the industry’s impacts. In combining empirical data and a novel theoretical application to ecotourism-related solid waste crises, this chapter contributes to meeting objectives 1, 2 and 3, and also proposes that extending EJ out to include the consumer’s role and responsibility could contribute to objective 4.
Chapter 1: Call it consumption! (Re)conceptualizing ecotourism as consumption and consumptive

1 This chapter was published in Geography Compass, with Lisa M. Campbell as a co-author. It is found in the reference list and is cited throughout the text as Meletis and Campbell 2007. The only change made to the paper for its inclusion into this dissertation was the removal of chapter subheading numbers.
Introduction

Despite existing critiques (Charnley 2005; Duffy 2002; Honey 1999; Kiss 2004; Lindberg, Enriquez, and Sproule 1996), ecotourism has emerged as a widely promoted strategy for reconciling wildlife conservation with human development. This is particularly the case among conservation organizations, for example World Wildlife Fund (BBC News 2004; Troëng and Drews 2004), and Conservation International (Conservation International 2004), and among academics and practitioners primarily concerned with wildlife (and more generally with nature) conservation (Tisdell and Wilson 2002). The promotion of ecotourism has been particularly noticeable in developing countries (Campbell 1999; Mowforth and Munt 1998; Weaver 1998). While there are many definitions of ecotourism in the literature, for the purposes of this paper we include two of those most commonly cited. The World Conservation Union (IUCN) defines ecotourism as “environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features – both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations” (Ceballos-Lascuráin 1993a, cited in Ceballos-Lascuráin 1996, 20). The International Ecotourism Society (no date) defines ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local
people.” Combined, these definitions highlight two common features of ecotourism definitions: first, that ecotourism can feature both natural and cultural attractions and second, that it has both environmental conservation and socio-economic development goals.

In conservation literature, ecotourism is often categorized as non-consumptive use of wildlife (and other environmental features) and contrasted with consumptive use. For example, writing about sea turtle tourism and whale watching, Wilson and Tisdell (2003) write:

…these two resources have been increasingly used for nonconsumptive purposes, marking a significant shift away from previous consumptive uses. Many countries, previously using these resources for consumption, are now turning to nonconsumptive uses in the form of nature-based tourism (Wilson and Tisdell 2003, 50).

Consumptive use is typically defined as the direct use or removal of wildlife through activities such as hunting (Freese 1998). In contrast, “While ecotourism can impact negatively on species and ecosystems, a definition of consumptive use based strictly on ‘deliberate removal of a species’ excludes ecotourism” (Campbell 2002b, 31). Labeling ecotourism as non-consumptive is based on several assumptions, however, namely that no direct consumption of wildlife occurs in ecotourism, that the direct consumption of wildlife is incompatible with ecotourism, and that the direct consumption of wildlife is the primary issue of concern. Furthermore, non-consumptive
use is often assumed to be a superior economic and environmental alternative to the consumptive use of wildlife. These assumptions have been challenged by geographers and other social scientists, and we draw on their work and our own research to demonstrate how labeling ecotourism as non-consumptive is not only misleading, but carries potential consequences for both local peoples and environments in ecotourism destinations. We also situate ecotourism in wider contemporary debates about the nature of consumption, and specifically regarding alternative consumption and moralizing consumption.

Prior to doing so, several caveats are noted here. First, a vast literature on ecotourism has emerged over the past two decades, much of it increasingly critical (e.g. Cater 2006; Duffy 2002; Honey 1999; Mowforth and Munt 1998; Weaver 1999; Wheeler 1994). While the problems with ecotourism are widely recognized in the tourism literature, enthusiasm for ecotourism remains in some of the major conservation organizations. It is in this context that we find assumptions about the non-consumptive nature of ecotourism particularly problematic. Second, debates about the meaning of ecotourism and the utility of term are also evident; and some critics outline criteria that need to be met for ecotourism to succeed (Ross and Wall 1999a; Scheyvens 1999). In this article, we accept claims to ecotourism at face value; if destinations, promoters, national governments, and tourists believe that what they are engaging in is ecotourism,
academic acceptance or rejection of such claims is to a certain extent irrelevant. For example, in one of the cases discussed in this paper, over 80,000 ‘ecotourists’ visit Tortuguero National Park, Costa Rica. Despite these large numbers of visitors and problems with environmental planning and management, Tortuguero is considered an ecotourism destination by actors of all kinds, at all scales, including environmental non-government organizations, the Costa Rican government, tour operators, local businesses, and tourists (Caribbean Conservation Corporation 2003; Cuevas and The Caribbean Conservation Corporation 2002; Harrison, Troëng, and assistants 2004; Smith 2005; Troëng 2004; Troëng and Drews 2004). Finally, while we are critical of ecotourism, we also accept that it is with us for the foreseeable future. As a result, we finish our article with suggestions for reconceptualizing ecotourism, rather than abandoning it all together.

**Unpacking the assumptions underlying the classification of ecotourism as non-consumptive use**

**No direct consumption of wildlife occurs in ecotourism**

Using the term ‘non-consumptive’ to describe ecotourism assumes a separation of ecotourism and the direct consumption of wildlife; however, most definitions of ecotourism do not directly preclude consumptive use. For example, the definition adopted by the IUCN refers to ‘enjoying’ wild plants and animals (Ceballos-Lascuráin
1996), and one interpretation of enjoying could include eating traditional dishes made from local ingredients. Wild game is an important source of protein in many parts of the world, and hunting, fishing, and trapping represent essential activities in many cultures (Freese 1998). Opportunities for incorporating such activities into tourism abound, and combining ecotourism and consumptive use could lead to increased socio-economic returns in some destinations (Freese 1998). Tourists undertaking Inuit-hosted eco-tours, for example, might be invited to attend a community feast that includes locally killed meats (Hinch 1998). Tourists might also participate directly in hunting and/or fishing; USA Today’s (2004) “10 great places to tread lightly on Earth” list of ecotourism destinations, for instance, includes fishing as part of the promoted activities for two destinations (Sell 2004). In Botswana, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Pakistan, eco-tours that include game hunting provide an important source of revenue to parks and protected areas (Akama 1996; Freese 1998; Mowforth and Munt 1998; Novelli, Barnes, and Humavindu 2006), thus linking consumptive use directly to conservation. Therefore, not only are there examples where ecotourism and consumptive use are combined, there may be further instances where they are compatible.

**Direct consumption of wildlife is incompatible with ecotourism**

Defining ecotourism as non-consumptive perpetuates a Western-influenced, pro-preservation and anti-extraction conception of ecotourism, and masks the heterogeneous
nature of peoples, places, and activities that compose ecotourism (Akama 1996; Nygren 2003). The worldviews of many indigenous peoples, for instance, are at odds with the preservation-focused Western morals that ecotourism is infused with (Hinch 1998). Some indigenous peoples view extractive practices and rituals as an important part of their culture and their interactions with the environment. Defining ecotourism as incompatible with consumption renders these practices incompatible with ecotourism. It also homogenizes the consumptive use of wildlife, denying the diversity of practices and views associated with it, and suggests that “non-consumptive activities reflect and convey morally superior values and lead to more intense and desirable experiences” (Tremblay 2001, 83). This in turn limits the potential to use ecotourism as a means of conserving local culture. Hinch (1998) suggests that extractive practices that might “offend the sensibilities of many ecotourists” (Hinch 1998, 121) are often separated from tourists in a spatial or temporal manner, thus denying tourists authentic experiences (MacCannell 1973), because of the values and expectations of ecotourism as non-consumptive (Carrier and Macleod 2005; West and Carrier 2004). Thus, in spite of an emphasis on nature and culture in many ecotourism definitions (as in Ceballos-Lascuráin 1996; but see also Wall 1996; Weaver 2005), nature ‘trumps’ culture when cultural practices do not conform to Western expectations of what ecotourism should be (Carrier and Macleod 2005; Ryan, Hughes, and Chirgwin 2000; Weaver 2005). This in
turn may prevent ecotourism from achieving its goals of cultural conservation and limit
the development of local heritage preservation via tourism. In such instances, outcomes
are difficult to predict, but can include increasing tensions between ecotourism/ists and
local host communities.

There are examples of local communities attempting to reclaim or take (greater)
control of ecotourism development, infusing it with their own values (Wall and Long
1996; Stronza 2001, 2000; Wesche 1996; Johnston 2003). For example, Amanda Stronza
(2000), details the efforts of the Native Community of Infierno, Peru, to remain a serious
partner in their shared ecotourism endeavor with Rainforest Expeditions. Huichols’
community assemblies in Mexico are also involved in the planning and running of a
Huichol community-based ecotourism program called the Blue Dear Visitors Program,
in which tourists, called ‘visitors’, are placed in Huichol households (Nauman 2002).
Australian examples of aboriginal community members’ efforts to enter into ecotourism
include community-sponsored Aboriginal tour networks and related websites (e.g.
www.aboriginaltouroperators.com), as promoted by Aboriginal Groups such as
Kalkadoon, an Aboriginal women’s group (Kalkadoon 2007). While these examples do
not rely on the extractive use of wildlife per se (although fishing is part of the Australian
example), such use is much easier to conceive of within community controlled ventures;
Tremblay (2001) specifically considers the potential compatibility of indigenous lifestyles and cultures with extractive use through recreational hunting and fishing.

**Direct consumption of wildlife is the only issue of concern**

Focusing definitions of ecotourism on the direct interaction of tourism/ists and wildlife assumes that this interaction is the primary concern in terms of consumption. However, there are other ways in which ecotourism can be consumptive, and three issues are considered below.

First, by focusing on the ‘direct removal of the species’ in defining consumptive use, the figurative consumption (including visual consumption) associated with ecotourism and impacts thereof are overlooked. Ecotourism, as an act of visual consumption, is similar to mass tourism in that the ecotourist aesthetic, which often demands the appearance of ‘pristine nature’, is catered to, often as a primary management concern. This frequently involves shielding/separating ecotourists from their own impacts, as well as others. Their exposure to local impacts is also typically limited by the lengths of their stays, which are often relatively short, and the rise of organized eco-tours (Weaver 2001; Mowforth and Munt 1998; Shepherd 2002) that direct ecotourist gazes onto very specific sites, places, and landscapes, and away from other less desirable sights (Ryan, Hughes, and Chirgwin 2000; Urry 1995).
Social scientists have contributed greatly to our understanding of ‘the Tourist Gaze’ (Urry 1995, 2002) and the ‘ecotourist gaze’ (Hughes and Morrison-Saunders 2003; Hvenegaard and Dearden 1998; Ryan, Hughes, and Chirgwin 2000), and how this influences everything from destination images projected (Nelson 2005), to tour content and attraction design (Luck 2003; Carrier and Macleod 2005), to community members’ identities (Mowforth and Munt 1998), to local environmental management needs and concerns (Carrier and Macleod 2005; Smith and Duffy 2003). For example, the primacy of visual consumption of environmental features and landscapes in ecotourism can generate undesirable behaviors on the part of guides and/or attraction staff, who may undertake activities such as feeding wild animals so that nature ‘performs’ for watching ecotourists (Edensor 2001; Evans 1999; Farrell and Marion 2001; Grossberg, Treves, and Naughton-Treves 2003). Other activities related to visual consumption, like photography, can also have negative impacts on species, especially if they remain neglected (Campbell 1994; Ryan, Hughes, and Chirgwin 2000; Grossberg, Treves, and Naughton-Treves 2003; Edensor 2001). Furthermore, tourists’ demands for an ecotourism aesthetic can directly conflict with conservation goals. In Montego Bay, Jamaica, for example, tourists viewed local people fishing (legally) within a marine park as detracting from the park landscape. Park staff felt increasing pressure to remove the fishers from the park in order to satisfy the aesthetic expectations of ecotourists, and had
little time to devote to environmental issues that they considered to be problematic, such as decreased water quality. Since the latter did not interfere with tourists’ visual consumption of the marine landscape, it was difficult for park managers, who were under pressure to ensure tourist satisfaction, to prioritize (West and Carrier 2004). Thus, managing primarily for the ecotourism aesthetic and for figurative consumption of landscapes can result in material consequences for the environment and animal species within it, even if so-called ‘consumptive use’ (i.e. direct removal of species) is not occurring.

A second consequence of focusing on the ‘direct removal of the species’ in distinguishing between consumptive and non-consumptive use is that it masks the ways in which ecotourism can consume resources and result in broader negative environmental impacts, beyond those that occur on-site in ecotourist destinations. For example, much ecotourism consists of First World ecotourists or Third World elites traveling to remote destinations abroad. While negative environmental impacts associated with high energy consumption through jet travel are recognized (Gössling 2000), these are typically left out of ecotourism impact assessments since such impacts occur extra-locally, before/after the ecotourist is at their destination. Therefore, the larger ecological footprint of ecotourism as a consumptive activity, from doorstep to
destination and back, is not considered (Gössling et al. 2002; Hall 1994; Rees and Wackernagel 1994).

On-site, many eco-destinations include problematic contradictions between tourists’ interests in ‘nature’ and their resource demands. For example, ecotourists might consume high amounts of energy and/or water in hotels, and may demand imported goods that require extensive transport and/or packaging (Gössling 2003). Despite theoretical claims regarding ecotourists being more environmentally aware, there is little empirical evidence to support such claims. Ecotourists have been known to consume products such as unsustainable local (or imported) seafood, and problematic ‘natural’ souvenirs such as shark jaws, corals, and ornamental shells (Gössling 2003). These observations have led some scholars to question the existence of the ‘ecotourist’ as a distinct tourist type (e.g. Mowforth and Munt 1998; Weaver 1999; Duffy 2002; Wheeler 1994).

Lastly, the consumption of goods and services associated with ecotourism often produces a suite of challenging environmental impacts such as waste and sewage generation (Brown et al. 1997; Lee and Snepenger 1992; Stern et al. 2003; Thrupp 1990; Carrier and Macleod 2005; Smith and Duffy 2003; Young 1999; Garrett 2005; Gössling 2003). Such impacts are often complicated by the fact that many preferred ecotourist destinations are in places that are located far from impact-related services and
infrastructure, and are therefore likely to have limited waste disposal or treatment options available to them (Hillery et al. 2001).

In Tortuguero, Costa Rica, a well-known ecotourism destination, efforts to manage a growing solid waste problem have been made since the 1990s (Lee and Snepenger 1992; Place 1991; Troëng and Drews 2004). Tortuguero’s ability to deal with this problem is arguably constrained by its very success as an ecotourism destination; upwards of 80,000 tourists visit Tortuguero each year (de Haro, Troeng, and assistants 2005; Harrison, Troëng, and assistants 2004), and access to the village and park is by boat or plane, which contributes to the tourist’s sense of geographic isolation and ‘wilderness.’ This same isolation makes solid waste management challenging, as the logistical difficulty and expense of boating or flying garbage and recyclables out of Tortuguero are considerable. That most of the region is protected in a national park also constrains on-site management of garbage. Tortuguero’s solid waste management problem reflects an ongoing debate in the wider tourism literature about whether or not the environmental impacts of ecotourism development are actually worse (or at least more difficult to manage) than those associated with mass tourism (Ryan, Hughes, and Chirgwin 2000; Weaver 2001). For example, some critics argue that ecotourism might be dispersing the impacts of tourism into more fragile environments where communities lack the resources to manage them (similar to issues faced by small island destinations...
(Coccossis 2002). In contrast mass tourism development has the potential for the concentration of impacts and related infrastructure, and thus for improving environmental efficiency (Brown et al. 1997; Pleumarom 1999; Wall and Long 1996; Weaver 1998). While this debate is rarely reflected in the conservation literature, it illustrates the ways in which some of the original assumptions about ecotourism are being questioned.

Third, by focusing on whether or not wildlife or other environmental features are consumed, the role of ecotourism in consuming cultures is ignored. While definitions of ecotourism often reference both environment and culture, ecotourism’s overall focus on ‘pristine nature’ (Akama 1996) means local people often end up being underemphasized or ignored. When they are included as part of the ecotourism attraction, they are often or portrayed as stereotypes (e.g. indigenous peoples as ecocentric noble savages, Bryant and Goodman 2004; Hinch 1998; Mowforth and Munt 1998; Urry 1995), and rich and complicated cultures are reduced to snapshots or themes for tourists to consume (e.g. Tibet as a theme in Ateljevic and Doorne 2005). Considered to be part of the landscape by the ecotourist gaze, if they are seen at all, local peoples must conform to the images imposed on them through the ecotourism aesthetic, and remain in a stage of suspended animation (e.g. not wearing overly modern dress) and/or live as exaggerated versions of their culture that do not represent its current reality (Hinch 1998; Carrier and Macleod
2005), a process that Mowforth and Munt (1998) refer to as ‘zooification’ of culture. This creation of a ‘staged authenticity’ or an artificial version of the destination in order to suit tourist needs, expectations and desires (MacCannell 1973) can lead to the suppression (or segregation) of their actual modern culture (Hinch 1998) and/or to hostility and resistance to ecotourism and the constraints it places on local culture and identities (Doxey 1975; Campbell, Gray, and Meletis in press; Smith and Duffy 2003; Chapter 3, this thesis). Furthermore, locating consumptive use (hunting, fishing) outside of acceptable on-site practices in an ecotourism-based community, by the outright forbidding of such practices (e.g. through park-related legislation) or by pushing them into the destination’s ‘backstage’ (MacCannell 1999), could also drive “an elusive wedge between hosts and guests” (Tremblay 2001, 84).

On-site consumption of goods and services can also have undesirable impacts on local culture and society. Selling souvenirs, for example, might be linked to the commodification of local culture, the re-enforcement of local stereotypes, and/or adversely affecting local culture or identities in other ways (Garrett 2005; Goss 2004; Nelson 2005; Mowforth and Munt 1998). Local people are not simply passive victims of ecotourism development and the commodification of their culture that it may bring,

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2 Campbell, Gray and Meletis (2007) was ‘in press’ when this chapter was published as a paper in Geography Compass.
however, and the consumptive relationship between host and guest is dialectical, with
the degree of local involvement in “embodiments of production and consumption” and
the negotiation of local images varying from place to place (Ateljevic and Doorne 2005).
Local entrepreneurs learn from ecotourists, for example in determining how to sell their
products/tours as being ‘more authentic’ than others, thus ‘blurring’ the boundaries
between consumption and production (Ateljevic and Doorne 2005) and revealing the
importance of figurative consumption and the aesthetics of ecotourism as forces that
shape the industry. Nonetheless, the consumption of culture, identity, and peoples is
occurring on many levels through ecotourism, and this can have negative impacts on
local peoples (discussed further below).

**Non-consumptive use via ecotourism is superior to consumptive use of
wildlife, for environments, economies, and peoples**

Contrasts made between consumptive use of wildlife and non-consumptive use
via ecotourism are typically employed to paint non-consumptive use as inherently more
beneficial for both environments and people (Campbell 2002b, 2002a, 2002c). For
example, a recent WWF publication, *Money Talks*, promotes sea turtle based ecotourism
over consumptive use of turtles and makes the following claim:

Non-consumptive use generates more revenue, has greater economic
multiplying effects, greater potential for economic growth, creates more support
for management, and generates proportionally more jobs, social development
and employment opportunities for women than consumptive use (Troëng and Drews 2004, 7).

Not only is non-consumptive use depicted as more valuable economically, but as incompatible with consumptive use, in both the WWF and other studies:

Non-consumptive economic values [of sea turtles] show the opportunity costs of consumptive uses (e.g. meat, eggs) and incidental destruction (e.g. from boat strikes, entanglement in prawn trawls and crab pots) of sea turtles (Wilson and Tisdell 2001, 279).

Such claims may apply in some places, but there are counter examples where ecotourism and direct consumptive use of wildlife co-exist. For example, in the Ostional Wildlife Refuge, Costa Rica, a legalized harvest of sea turtle eggs co-exists with turtle-based ecotourism (Campbell 1998, 1999). In this case, consumptive use has emerged as the preferred economic option for most community members. The legalized egg harvest is community-controlled, and sale of sea turtle eggs has been on-going for over 20 years. It provides substantial economic benefits that are widely distributed in the community (Campbell 1998; Campbell, Haalboom, and Trow 2007). In contrast, existing tourism development in Ostional, while lucrative for those involved, benefits few local families and is increasingly dominated by foreign investors (Campbell 1999). While local people see the benefits of tourism and most are in favor of its expansion, there is little to no desire to replace of the egg harvest with tourism, and most local people do not see these
activities as incompatible (Campbell, Haalboom, and Trow 2007). Furthermore, whereas current management of the turtle egg harvest lies with community members and the benefits are distributed in an agreed upon way, there is no guarantee that the benefits from the expansion of local ecotourism development would be distributed similarly, and there is concern among local people about the ability to capture and retain benefits locally (Campbell, Haalboom, and Trow 2007). In the case of Ostional, the consumptive use of wildlife is also believed to be environmentally sustainable, with no evidence of decreases in the numbers of nesting turtles over time (Ballestero, Arauz, and Rojas 2000), despite the direct removal of the eggs of a species classified as endangered by the IUCN.

While labeling ecotourism non-consumptive implies that ecotourism is ‘naturally’ less damaging to the environment than consumptive uses of wildlife, there is nothing inherent in ecotourism that guarantees minimal or negligible environmental outcomes, just as consumptive use will not always lead to the depletion of the resources consumed. The impacts (positive and negative) of ecotourism as a form of development depend on a host of factors such as the quality of planning and management involved (Nelson 1994), the cultural appropriateness of ecotourism as a form of development (Boyd and Butler 1996; Charnley 2005; Scheyvens 1999, 2002), the level of impact management (Boyd and Butler 1996; Ross and Wall 1999a), the volume and type of ecotourism visitation to an area (Weaver 1999; Young 1999), and the resiliency of the
local environment vis-à-vis ecotourism’s impacts (Bhattarai, Conway, and Shrestha 2005; Weaver 1998). Just like any other form of development, ecotourism can be well planned for and managed or poorly planned for and managed (Shepherd 2002). Case study literature details repeated examples of ecotourism development that has included negative impacts on wildlife and the environment, and of ecotourism acting “as a double-edged sword, with its ‘success’ causing the eventual destruction of the resources being protected” (Campbell 2002b, 41).

Ecotourism can also change consumption patterns and preferences in local communities, with impacts on economy, society, and environment. When ecotourists arrive in a destination, they bring their level of consumption with them in their dress, in their on-site demands, and in representations of their lifestyles found in their daily interactions with local people. This can have profound impacts on local communities, particularly those that are more remote, if local people then aspire to achieve the same material status as tourists, a phenomenon long associated with tourism and known as the demonstration affect (Bhattarai, Conway, and Shrestha 2005; Carrier and Macleod 2005; Weaver 1998). The point here is not to question whether changing local demand for income and goods is a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ thing; concern for the demonstration effect can be interpreted as paternalistic and neo-colonial, i.e. as an effort to freeze local communities as a phase of (lesser) development. Rather, we highlight the
demonstration effect to point to the complex network of consumption-related relationships between ecotourism, ecotourists, and host communities that may be overlooked when ecotourism is described as ‘non-consumptive’, a label that does not capture ecotourism’s role in the importation of First World lifestyles and consumption levels to ecotourism destinations.

**Situating ecotourism in wider debates about moralizing consumption**

In the above sections, we interrogated some of the assumptions associated with popular definitions of ecotourism and its impacts on environments and communities, to illustrate the ways in which the classification of ecotourism as non-consumptive is misleading and can mask the negative consequences of ecotourism for both environments and people. These consequences are well catalogued in the tourism literature (e.g. Cater 2006; Duffy 2002; Honey 1999; Mowforth and Munt 1998; Weaver 1999; Wheeler 1994). In this section we take a step back from ecotourism in practice and its impacts, to situate ecotourism in wider contemporary debates about the nature of consumption, and specifically about current trends in ‘moralizing’ consumption and tourism (Bryant and Jarosz 2004; Butcher 2003).

The world has been described as increasingly consumption-driven, a trend that affords consumers power and that gives acts of consumption political meaning (Miller
Consumption is identified as a new site for activism and a new locus for civil society (Bryant and Jarosz 2004; Butcher 2003), and this has inspired interest in alternative consumption, with consumers expressing their moral preferences through their choice to purchase, for example, fair trade coffee or ecotourism holidays. Ecotourism is portrayed as a way to ‘save’ nature or particular components of it, in several ways (Campbell, Gray, and Meletis in press). First, ecotourism provides an alternative source of income to peoples who, otherwise, would at least partially focus their efforts on the consumptive use of wildlife and/or other resource extraction (Tisdell and Wilson 2002; Gray 2002; Bryant and Goodman 2004; Mowforth and Munt 1998; Smith and Duffy 2003; Clay 2004; Campbell 2002a). Second, in choosing an ecotourism holiday, ecotourists believe they are reducing impacts on the environment, as ecotourism is also marketed as a more environmentally-friendly form of travel (Duffy 2002; Honey 1999; Mowforth and Munt 1998). A narrative of ‘ecotourism as helping’ is pervasive, and can be found in tourist accounts of their travel experiences, as the example below illustrates:

Afterward, as we stroll back to the village of Tortuguero, I recall my mixed feelings about the human impact on this environment. Now I’m going home joyous that my presence here helped an entire nest of baby turtles survive the first challenge of their lives (Clay 2004, 1).
Thus, through consumer choice, acts of consumption are transformed into acts of caring (Miller 1998; Popke 2006), and alternative consumption becomes a moral act (Bryant and Goodman 2004; Bryant and Jarosz 2004; Butcher 2003).

Ecotourism is a particularly interesting form of alternative consumption, for two main reasons. First, Bryant and Goodman (2004) identify two commodity cultures that exist within alternative consumption: (i) conservation-seeking (seeking to preserve the environment), and (ii) solidarity-seeking (seeking to support peoples and cultures). While Bryant and Goodman (2004) examine products that fit into one category or the other, ecotourism, at least in theory, combines both, due to its combined goals of wildlife preservation and local economic development. In practice, however, conservation-seeking culture often wins out over the solidarity-seeking, and the need to ‘trade-off’ between these reveals some of the contradictions inherent in alternative consumption (Campbell, Gray, and Meletis in press). Second, unlike many alternative consumption products that face the problem of consumers ‘caring-at-a-distance’ (Popke 2006), with the object of their concern far removed from them (e.g. regarding organic or fair trade coffees: coffee pickers live far away from First World coffee drinkers), ecotourism brings the caregiver/consumer to the object of the of care/consumption through travel to the site (Barnett et al. 2005). In theory, this should allow for ecotourists as consumers to surmount the challenge of caring-at-a-distance. In practice, however, the ecotourist
remains distanced from the end results of their act of consumption or ‘caring’ because, for the most part, such impacts (e.g. environmental impacts) remain ‘backstage’ or are otherwise unobvious to the ecotourist (MacCannell 1999; Edensor 2001).

While some scholars view the trend towards alternative consumption as positive, others are more critical. For example, alternative forms of consumption such as ecotourism may only reaffirm the primacy of both consumption and capitalism, and can be seen as products of neo-liberal economic policies (Campbell 2002b; Campbell, Gray, and Meletis in press). Ryan et al. (2000), for example, see ecotourism as a form of consumption first and foremost, and view attempts to portray it as a morally superior undertaking as suspect. All travel for pleasure is form of conspicuous consumption in that it is a function of privilege (e.g. the ability to get time off, to accrue disposable income, to travel to a destination), and, while ecotourism comes in a variety of forms, many ecotourism opportunities are elite, involving travel to remote and expensive destinations (Cater 2006; Mowforth and Munt 1998; Hall 1994; Thrupp 1990). Some experts argue that exclusive ecotourism is desirable precisely because it maximizes profits while minimizing the number of people participating (Akama 1996; Gössling 2003; Mowforth and Munt 1998). However, highly affluent clients sometimes present correspondingly high demands for luxury services, and these demands may place significant burdens, environmental and otherwise, on host communities (Bhattarai,
Conway, and Shrestha 2005). There is also a certain irony involved in labeling such an elite form of consumption as non-consumptive.

The moralized discourse of ecotourists as ‘caring’ also emphasizes what ecotourists put into their travel choices, rather than what they get out of them, such as the cultural capital associated with traveling to the ‘right’ place to do the ‘right’ thing, under ‘challenging’ conditions that ecotourists must endure in order to be able to tell their post-trip tales (Ateljevic and Doorne 2005; Mowforth and Munt 1998; Ryan, Hughes, and Chirgwin 2000). Highly exclusive ecotourism opportunities further reinforce a sense of privilege through their limited accessibility; they represent extreme demands regarding location, financing, and social capital that only a ‘few’ can fulfill. Thus, ecotourism affords a certain cache to the ecotourist and builds their cultural capital, just like drinking organic and/or fair trade coffee does; it serves to mark status and segregate within society, while appealing to those within the same social class (e.g. other ecotourists) (Roseberry 1996). In this light, ecotourism is a product, purchased to fulfill a variety of complex consumer needs.

Re-conceptualizing ecotourism

We have attempted to illustrate the ways in which labeling ecotourism as non-consumptive is misleading. Labeling is not just a matter of semantics, however, and ecotourism’s non-consumptive label limits its potential for simultaneously preserving
both environments and cultures, down-plays its material impacts on both environments and people, and masks its role in larger systems of production and consumption. In this final section, we discuss why the non-consumptive label persists and how we might re-conceptualize ecotourism.

Ecotourism is often closely associated with parks and protected areas, and while the popularity of ecotourism means that it now takes place in a number of different environments, both protected and non-protected, the link between ecotourism and parks and protected areas helps to explain the emphasis put on ecotourism as non-consumptive. Campbell (2002a; 2002c) for example, has argued that promoting ecotourism allows conservationists interested in species preservation to speak the language of a conservation counter-narrative. This arose in opposition to a traditional narrative of exclusionary parks and protected areas, that emphasizes community-based conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, and is related to the more general rise of interest in sustainable development. By promoting non-consumptive use and including goals of cultural conservation and local socio-economic development, ecotourism allows conservationists to adopt this counter-narrative. However, because ecotourism often occurs to parks and protected areas (and can be used to rationalize the creation of more parks), conservationists can speak the language of a counter-narrative while retaining parks and protected areas (the very thing the counter-narrative
originally opposed) (Campbell 2002a). By labeling ecotourism non-consumptive, ecotourism ‘fits’ with the traditionally non-extractive policies of parks, while other consumptive uses do not. More recently, Campbell et al. (2007) have argued that, rather than being a mere outcome of the conservation counter-narrative, ecotourism itself is a narrative; one that persists because it meets the needs of a variety of interest groups (conservationists, tourists, tourism operators, governments), regardless of their views on the best way to pursue conservation and development.

While there are case studies of ecotourism where its goals as currently conceived are realized in practice (e.g. Stronza 2000; Wesche 1996; Wunder 2003; Colvin 1996), more common are those showing ecotourism’s disappointments (e.g. Honey 1999; Kiss 2004; Lindberg, Enriquez, and Sproule 1996; Charnley 2005; Duffy 2002). We suggest these disappointments arise at least in part due to the non-consumptive conceptualization of ecotourism in the conservation literature, and the related focus on the direct interaction of tourists and wildlife (or other environmental features of interest). When focusing on such interactions, other impacts are hidden and, therefore, unacknowledged, unanticipated, and unaddressed. As a result, we argue that ‘the project of ecotourism’ needs to be re-conceptualized. This re-conceptualization should recognize ecotourism’s consumptive nature in all of the ways outlined in the first part of
this paper, while simultaneously seeing it as much more than just a product for sale or purchase.

First, consumptive use should be considered as a possible component of ecotourism, when such use is biologically feasible, socio-economically beneficial, and culturally appropriate and desirable. When consumptive use is possible and included in an ecotourism package, ecotourism might go further in achieving its dual goals of environmental and cultural conservation, with benefits for both environments and people. Furthermore, ecotourism that includes consumptive use might make it more amenable to a wider variety of cultural views from around the world, less Western biased, and more compatible with existing and diverse human-environment relations in potential destinations. Such a shift seems to be more in-line with the wants and desires of many communities and/or indigenous groups interested in self-organized participation in ecotourism (Hinch 1998; Wesche 1996; Johnston 2003). This would also help change our conceptions of ecotourism as simply a service or product being bought and sold, to ecotourism as a process that is negotiated between ‘hosts and guests’ and between different cultures, worldviews, and value systems.

Second, ecotourism’s wider consumptive impacts on the environment, both figurative and literal, should be explicitly recognized as critical to ecotourism planning and management. For example, acknowledging the visual consumption associated with
ecotourism forces us to see ecotourist landscapes not as ‘natural’, but as produced to satisfy an ecotourist aesthetic. Satisfying this has traditionally involved shielding/separating ecotourists from their impacts; ecotourists are often presented with sanitized or ‘greenwashed’ versions of destinations (Carrier and Macleod 2005; Scheyvens 2002), rather than exposed to local environmental and conservation realities. A re-conceptualized ecotourism could include attention to issues like site management as part of the ecotourism product; ecotourists could be encouraged to look at not only nature, but how it, and its consumption through ecotourism, is managed. This new approach could provide much-needed opportunities for directed fundraising and/or tourist volunteer work (e.g. for a local recycling program) targeted to specific tourism-associated environmental impacts (e.g. waste management shortcomings), and help to alleviate the environmental pressures felt in some ecotourism destinations. The rise of interest in so-called volunteer ecotourism suggests that this type of engagement is possible. While volunteer ecotourism has itself been critiqued (Gray and Campbell 2007), Wearing (2001) forwards it as the ecotourism ‘ideal’. At a more fundamental level, recognizing ecotourism is a highly visual and aesthetically-oriented form of tourism allows us to more fully contemplate authenticity, or lack thereof, and the role of artifice in ecotourism management and marketing, and how management and
marketing practices perpetuate or challenge the notion that ecotourism is ‘non-
consumptive’.

Third, a re-conceptualized vision of ecotourism should give greater emphasis to
the consumptive impacts, figurative and literal, of ecotourism on local communities,
their natural resources, economies, and cultures. While cultural conservation and
economic development are included as goals in ecotourism definitions, the assumed
superiority of ecotourism to alternative forms of resource use means that impacts of
ecotourism on communities are largely assumed to be positive. As long as ‘nature
trumps culture’ for ecotourists, such assumptions are problematic. A move to pay more
genuine attention to local people, however, might require concessions such as allowing
the consumptive-use of wildlife in some ecotourism destinations, and thus the first point
of re-conceptualization remains critical.

We believe that re-conceptualizing ecotourism will open up possibilities for
improving it, and that due to ecotourism’s popularity, looking for possibilities remains
important. First, acknowledging the importance of consumption in ecotourism helps to
break down the often over-stated distinctions made between ecotourism and mass
tourism, and highlights the ways in which these are similar. This provides opportunities
for knowledge transfer; conventional tourism, its development, and responses to it have
long been studied and there are lessons learned, best practices, and strategies that could
be used (both preventatively and responsively) to lessen undesirable consequences of ecotourism development. Acknowledging the role of consumption in both ecotourism and mass tourism creates conceptual space in which such information exchanges can occur, and may lessen the need to ‘re-invent the wheel’ when thinking about and managing ecotourism.

Second, situating ecotourism in the larger trend of moralizing consumption allows us to evaluate it not simply as a form of development or as a leisure activity, but as part of a larger socio-economic phenomenon that involves consumers changing purchasing practices and producers carving out new market niches. As such, ecotourism is similar to other ‘alternative’ products developed to meet new consumer demands, like organic and/or fair trade foodstuffs, sweatshop-free textiles, and child labor-free consumer goods. Considering ecotourism in the context of a wider consumer culture opens up new opportunities for making comparisons between such products, the socio-economic processes and industries that produce them, and the people who buy and sell them; looking at ecotourism as consumption also forces us to consider its production. Again, lessons learned with other alternative products may be applied to ecotourism.

Finally, while re-conceptualizing ecotourism should increase the possibilities for ecotourism to contribute to both conservation and development, we also believe that it will allow for more informed decision-making about whether or not to undertake
ecotourism at all. If we continue to focus only on the ‘direct removal of the species’ then ecotourism will continue to be, by default, the preferred conservation option; if more animals/resources remain intact, we must be ‘better off’. If, however, we broaden our analysis to include wider environmental, economic, cultural and social impacts of ecotourism from the beginning, then all conservation and development options may be more realistically assessed for their real costs and benefits.

This paper contributes to a growing critique of ecotourism that does not call for an abandonment of ecotourism, but rather for a re-conceptualization of the ways in which we plan for, discuss, and evaluate ecotourism. This re-conceptualization is required in order that ecotourism can achieve its goals in more than a few select cases. Given the association of ecotourism with dominant conservation narratives, and the persistence of narratives in spite of challenges to their validity (Roe 1991; Adams and Hulme 2001; Campbell 2002b, 2002a), the re-conceptualization called for here will not be easily achieved. However, if we are to move beyond restricted visions of ecotourism that conform to (and reconfirm) Western expectations of nature and culture, that carry hidden environmental, social and cultural costs, and that contribute to an ‘alternative’ consumer culture that does little to challenge the status quo, then such re-conceptualization is necessary and long overdue.
Chapter 2: Looking upon ‘nature’ and gazing upon garbage: Tourist perceptions of Tortuguero, Costa Rica.
Introduction

Despite the attention that ‘the tourist gaze’ receives in the tourism literature, it is seldom treated as an ecotourism management and planning consideration. Similarly, the aesthetic aspects of tourism’s negative environmental impacts are rarely addressed, despite their ability to disrupt the tourist gaze and generate negative word of mouth. This paper uses the case study of tourist perceptions of a solid waste crisis in Tortuguero, Costa Rica, to argue that tourists do notice the aesthetics of (some) negative environmental impacts and that such impacts should therefore be given aesthetic as well as environmental consideration. We also argue that the potential exists for incorporating ecotourism-related environmental management challenges, which can be aesthetically displeasing, into the ecotourism landscape and the ecotourist gaze (Ryan et al. 2000; Urry 2002), rather than simply working to shield tourists from them.

Tortuguero is an internationally renowned ecotourism destination famous for its turtle conservation efforts, turtle tourism, and Tortuguero National Park. Scholars have written about: ecotourism to the area (Jacobson and Robles 1992; Lee and Snepenger 1992; Place 1995), on-site turtle conservation efforts and/or the nesting turtle population (Bjorndal et al. 1999; Troëng and Rankin 2005; Troëng 2004; Bjorndal 1998), village culture and history (Lefever 1992), local turtle guiding (Peskin 2002), turtle conservation volunteers (Smith 2002; Campbell and Smith 2006), and about Tortuguero’s place in
Costa Rican conservation and ecotourism history (Campbell 2002b; Honey 1999; Evans 1999; Weaver 1999). Little has been written about tourists to Tortuguero, however, and what has been written is now dated. For example, both Lee and Snepenger (1992) and Jacobson and Robles (1992) address tourist wants, needs, and perceptions of Tortuguero via survey research, but their studies were conducted in the early 1990s and considerable changes have occurred since then (e.g. size and scale of tourism in Tortuguero, see site description).

We seek to update the literature on Tortuguero by answering the following questions:

- Who are the tourists to Tortuguero during the green turtle nesting season and what are they interested in seeing in Tortuguero?

- What are their perceptions of the local environment (especially the solid waste crisis)?

- What do their perceptions suggest about the types of tourists that they are?

- What environmental management implications arise from their perceptions of the environment in Tortuguero?

In this paper, we explore tourist perceptions of Tortuguero, drawing on a survey of tourists conducted in 2003 and 2004, a time during which a solid waste crisis was visible upon the landscape. The survey collected demographic information on tourists, information on tourist motivations for visiting Tortuguero, and their impressions of
various aspects of the experience. We use results from this survey to investigate the
degree to which ecotourism’s strain on the environment, in the form of the local solid
waste crisis, penetrates the tourist gaze; we also contemplate the academic and
management-related implications of these results. Further, we use the results of this
study to ‘complicate’ the ecotourist as a tourist type and Tortuguero as an ecotourist
destination.

The data presented here add a new dimension to a well known case study of
‘ecotourism in practice’. We also seek to move beyond a simple case study; Tortuguero
shares common traits with many popular ecotourism destinations of the Global South. It
is relatively isolated, it is linked to a national parks and protected areas system, it hosts a
‘natural’ looking environment as well as a number of charismatic species, most notably
turtles, and it is increasingly dependent on ecotourism revenue. We argue that there are
common problems in similarly isolated locales struggling to deal with tourism-related
waste impacts. Insights into tourist perceptions of such struggles in Tortuguero may
therefore be more widely applicable.
Theoretical background

The ecotourist gaze and the ecotourism aesthetic

Tourists view destinations through a tourist gaze\(^1\) (Urry 2002) or ecotourist gaze (Ryan, Hughes, and Chirgwin 2000) that is informed by family and friends (word of mouth)\(^2\), individual tourist histories and personalities, tourism marketing, and popular culture, among other influences. Different tourist gazes are associated with different types of tourism and what tourists are looking for (signs and signifiers associated with different destinations) and gazing upon. The ecotourist gaze, in theory, combines thespectatorial gaze and the romantic gaze (Urry 2002; Ryan, Hughes, and Chirgwin 2000). It is romantic because it emphasizes solitude, privacy, the semi-spiritual, and the search for ‘uncontaminated environments’ and offers nature as a “central positional good” (Urry 2002, 137). The ecotourist gaze is also spectatorial, especially in formats resembling ‘mass ecotourism’ (Weaver 2001), because it involves collective glancing at things (e.g. plants, animals) in passing.

The ecotourist gaze is based on notions of wilderness and ‘Nature’ (West and Carrier 2002; Cronon 1995; West and Carrier 2004; Akama 1996; Campbell, Gray, and

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\(^1\) The tourist gaze is a terms coined by John Urry, who has written extensively on the tourist gaze as a concept; he borrows Foucault’s notion of the medical gaze and how it affects health and healing and modern medical practice, and applies it as a ‘way of seeing’ in tourism, that belongs to the tourist and must be catered to by those who seek to satisfy the tourist gaze (Urry 2002).

\(^2\) ‘Family and friends’ were found to be key influences on destination choices of foreign tourists visiting Costa Rica (Costa Rica Tourism Board (ICT) 2006).
Meletis 2007). Gazing upon a destination involves the recognition of related signs and symbols (Bocock 1993). A canal full of wildlife in Costa Rica reflects ideas of pristine or Edenic nature associated with ecotourism, for example, while other ‘less natural’ landscape components such as modern buildings, do not (Bryant and Goodman 2004). The tourist gaze is strongly linked to tourists’ ‘search for authenticity’ (MacCannell 1973). The gaze fosters tourists’ symbolic departure from the ordinary and the mundane, to extraordinary places and cultures; they contrast their travel experiences with their routine at home (Urry 2002). The visual aspect of tourism (looking, seeing, watching, taking photographs) is a central component in tourists’ memory-making process and the recounting of their travels (Crawshaw and Urry 1997).

Ecotourism and nature-based tourism can be considered primarily visual aesthetics-centered activities, focused on watching the ‘spectacle’ of nature, with most ecotourists engaging in ecotourism as an affective (emotional) activity, rather than a cognitive activity (Gnoth 1997; Ryan, Hughes, and Chirgwin 2000). Like mass tourism, ecotourism must present ecotourists with opportunities to look upon new and exciting (exotic) things (Nelson 2005; Markwick 2001; Carrier and Macleod 2005; Ryan, Hughes, and Chirgwin 2000; Urry 2002). Some authors suggest that the primacy of the visual and ecotourism as an affective experience dominates over awareness and knowledge of the environment and the wildlife within it. For example, in Ryan et al’s study, 94% of
respondents described Fogg Dam (Australia) as an ecotourist experience (e.g. because they could see birds and plants) despite their lack of ability to name species and the passive nature of most of their experiences. The study concluded that tourist satisfaction at the Dam was largely related to animals seen and ‘naturalness’ (Ryan, Hughes, and Chirgwin 2000).

An ecotourism aesthetic is, therefore, created by and also informs the ecotourist gaze; it is a set of ideas about what ecotourist destinations should look like/not look like. According to the literature, the ‘archetypal ecotourism destination’ must be relatively undeveloped, and have ‘natural surroundings’ and exotic people/culture as main ‘attractions’ (Medina 2005; Orams 2002; Ryan, Hughes, and Chirgwin 2000; Carrier and Macleod 2005; Campbell, Gray, and Meletis in press). The geographic imaginary of ecotourism that created this ideal and is in turn influenced by it, includes Edenic myths of pristine nature and “fecund tropical natures” (Akama 1996; Bryant and Goodman 2004). Ecotourists travel with preconceived notions of what destinations should look like, according to such associated imagery. Literature on the ecotourist gaze reveals that ecotourism is a primarily visual activity but also that what is ‘seen’ also depends on who is doing the gazing and what their expectations are (Ryan et al. 2000; Urry 2002).

Given that ecotourists distinguish sights as either authentic or inauthentic representations of nature, wilderness, and wildlife when traveling (Bhattacharyya 1997),
deviations from this are seen as disrupting the gaze and drawing the authenticity of a site into question (Smith and Duffy 2003). Markers of authenticity in ecotourism include items, scenes, activities and places seen as ‘unspoiled’, ‘primitive’ and ‘remote’ (Cohen 1989, 428; Markwick 2001), while markers such as ‘modernity’, ‘poverty’, ‘environmental degradation’, and ‘social and political decay’ represent a troubled ecotourism destination; an appropriate landscape is not being maintained (Smith and Duffy 2003: 118). Building on the work of Urry (1995; Urry 2002) and Ryan et al. (2000), the ecotourist gaze can be disrupted by elements of the landscape that represent:

1) technological landscape guilt: seeing something on the landscape that is associated with modern technology and makes the tourist feel guilty, e.g. a nuclear power plant in front of a sunset (Thayer 1990 cited in Urry 1995);

2) elevated levels of perceived risk or danger: physical pollution such as visibly polluted water, or social pollution (unwanted social elements such as obvious unwanted drug use and other social problems on the landscape);

3) components of the mundane or everyday (tourist) life: observation of elements of the common, the mundane, the ordinary (e.g. signs of everyday modern life) in an ‘exotic’ landscape (Urry 1995); and

4) other violations of the ecotourism aesthetic or ethic: e.g. a destination does not appear ‘natural’ and/or it appears to be heavily impacted by tourism.

On the other hand, if there is no obvious violation of the gaze, tourists might not notice or be concerned with existing environmental impacts. Thus the visual might supersede the scientific measure of impacts. For example, in his recent article about the ‘pristine devastation’ of Bikini Atoll, Davis (2007) illustrates how the primacy of the
visual, and how the appearance of ‘pristine-ness’ can dominate tourists’ imaginations regardless of the actual state-of-the-environment. Since Bikini Atoll looks natural and undisturbed, interviewed tourists and scientists referred to it as ‘pristine’, ‘untouched’ and ‘unspoiled’, despite its lingering radioactivity and its radioactive history. The visual beauty of Bikini Atoll is mistaken for a pristine environment and is also actively used to “construct it as a wilderness area” (Davis 2007, 220).

**Keeping up appearances: the demands of the ecotourist aesthetic**

Given that ecotourism is primarily visual and destinations need to fulfill the tourist gaze in order to satisfy tourists (Urry 1995; Nelson 2005), a destination’s aesthetic must be created, maintained, and adjusted as ecotourism grows. For example, if an ecotourism-based community is having trouble managing its solid wastes, it is important that this problem remain ‘backstage’, out of the view of tourists, so that the appearance of ‘pristine nature’ can be maintained. To this end, landscapes are often preserved for their ‘aesthetic environmentalism’ rather than ‘sound scientific evidence’ (Duncan and Duncan 2001), and their ability to offer interesting viewing opportunities (Chirgwin and Hughes 1997 cited in Hughes and Morrison-Saunders 2003, 21). Green (1990) calls this ‘aesthetic conservation’ and contrasts it with scientific conservation. He defines aesthetic conservation as: conserving “an environment in accordance with pre-given conceptions of beauty and the sublime, conceptions which often depend upon
what is being contrasted with the environment in question” (Green 1990 cited in Urry 1995, 186). Keeping main attractions including parks and protected areas looking attractive to tourists is of paramount importance for continued success (Carrier and Macleod 2005). Furthermore, the work involved in maintaining the ecotourism aesthetic is often hidden from the tourists in order to maintain the ‘ecotourist bubble’ and shield such mundane practices (and the impacts of tourism to the area) from visiting tourists (Carrier and Macleod 2005). This is vital to maintaining the destination image and positive tourist-generated word of mouth, an important component of continued success (Grosspietsch 2006; Chaudhary 2000; Murphy, Pritchard, and Smith 2000; Yagi and Pearce 2007; Stokes and Lomax 2002; Kuvan and Akan 2005).

**Solid waste and the ecotourist gaze**

It is not uncommon for ecotourism destinations, especially those in the developing world, to expand without an according expansion of local sewage and waste management facilities (Lee and Snepenger 1992; Thrupp 1990; Carrier and Macleod 2005; Young 1999; Kuniyal 2005). Such mismatches can produce waste management problems that are visible on the landscape through the presence of litter or visible dump sites. Such sights can compromise the ecotourism aesthetic if they permeate the gaze (Farrell and Marion 2001; Hinch 1998). Solid waste (garbage; litter) is part of ‘the mundane’ (Urry 2002), the ‘backstage’ (MacCannell 1999) and the generally undesirable
components of any tourist landscape (Urry 2002). This is particularly true of the beach, which holds a special place in Western culture. Garbage on the beach disrupts tourist conceptions of beaches as ‘natural’ spaces (Davis 2007). Disturbing the gaze in this way risks lowering tourist satisfaction, and endangers the destination’s word-of-mouth reputation (Torres and Skillicorn 2004; Murphy, Pritchard, and Smith 2000; Yagi and Pearce 2007). Some experts have also suggested that nature-based tourists are particularly sensitive to and/or concerned about litter, human waste, and vandalism and are thus more prone to notice them (Hillery et al. 2001; Luck 2003).

Despite all of the aforementioned theory about the ecotourist gaze and the risks associated with disrupting it, and the known waste management challenges in some ecotourism destinations, most ecotourism assessments do not afford great consideration to the aesthetic components of tourism-associated environmental impacts but rather focus mainly on the physical impacts themselves and their possible ecological consequences (e.g. trail erosion is seen as threatening the environment rather than the ecotourist aesthetic). An exception is crowding at tourist sites, which is often considered as having potential environmental impacts (e.g. trampling and erosion potential; potential impacts on wildlife), as well as aesthetic implications: tourists do not like to see too many other tourists (Thomas, Pigozzi, and Sambrook 2005; Yagi and Pearce 2007).
We will use this case study to argue that the ecotourist gaze and the aesthetic components of environmental impacts should receive greater attention in ecotourism literature and in management.

**Tortuguero, Costa Rica**

This section of the paper will introduce the case study of Tortuguero, Costa Rica, in terms of its marketed image and its current reality, providing the context for the results.

**Tortuguero’s idealized image**

Costa Rica is marketed as a ‘green tourism’ or ecotourism destination, using images that play upon tourist desires for ‘pristine nature’ (Farrell and Marion 2001; Weaver 1999). Images of the quotidian and local people are largely absent from postcards of both Costa Rica and Tortuguero, with the exception of some scenes of local people in traditional dress or small tourist groups (personal observation). Such nature-focused idealized images coupled with the national tourism marketing slogan ‘Costa Rica- No Artificial Ingredients’ (Instituto Costarricense de Turismo (ICT) 2007) help to reinforce a romanticized ecotourism image (see Chapter 3, this thesis). Based on popular imagery of and claims about Costa Rica and Tortuguero, tourists could reasonably expect Tortuguero to include: 1) plentiful nature and wildlife, 2) little to no visible
tourism impacts, and 3) good planning and management, as well as the appearance of
benefits from ecotourism reaching the local environment and local people. Negative
environmental impacts should not be apparent upon the landscape (i.e. nature should
not appear to be compromised) and there should be obvious/visible environmental
management shortcomings (e.g. overflowing trash cans) in Tortuguero, if tourist
expectations are to be met. Ecotourism in Costa Rica should look like ecotourism and
hence, not like mass tourism, which it is often contrasted with in the tourism marketing
literature (i.e. there should not appear to be large tourist numbers, big crowds, or bulk
transportation).

Site description

The village of Tortuguero is located just south of Costa Rica’s northern border
with Nicaragua (Fig. 2.1). The village is located on an isolated land finger between an
extensive freshwater canal and lagoon system, and a black volcanic beach on the
Caribbean (Atlantic). There are no roads into the village and no cars; the village must be
reached by boat or plane, reinforcing ideas of Costa Rican destinations as Edenic and
pristine. Since its establishment in the 1930s/40s, Tortuguero village has had many
economic incarnations; it provided labor to neighboring plantations, it operated a small
scale lumber for export industry, and its inhabitants undertook turtle fishing and turtle
egg harvesting for both local consumption (small scale) and eventually for export, at a
much larger scale (Lefever 1992; Place 1991). It is now ecotourism-based, with Tortuguero National Park (TNP) being one of its main draws.

TNP (est. 1975) is located just south of the village. It is a conservation area with a firm no-extraction policy; it is part of the National Park system that is run by the national Ministry of the Environment and Energy (El Ministerio del Ambiente y Energia) or MINAE. The park comprises 26,156ha of land and 50,160ha of marine territory and protects 22 miles of turtle nesting beach (Caribbean Conservation Corporation 2007; Ministerio del Ambiente y Energia (MINAE) no date; Evans 1999). Tortuguero is one of the largest marine turtle nesting beaches in the Western Hemisphere and these turtles now provide attractions for nature-seeking tourists to the area (Bjorndal and Bolten 1992, Bjorndal et al. 1999).
Tourism to the area began in the late 1980s/early 1990s (Jacobson and Robles 1992; Lee and Snepenger 1992; Place 1991). The local tourism industry has experienced significant growth in recent years, in line with general growth of the industry in Costa Rica (Campbell 2002b, 2002a). Ecotourism is the current economic mainstay of the community, with most visitors coming for the busiest part of the green turtle nesting
season (June-September; peak is in July) or the Caribbean high season (December to April) (Cuevas 2002). TNP, which only drew 9,053 tourists in 1996, now receives over 80,000 tourists a year (Harrison, Troëng, and assistants 2004; de Haro, Troeng, and assistants 2005). Tortuguero accommodates both higher-end (lodge) ecotourists and lower-end (cabin) ecotourists. In 2004, there were 17 cabins that housed a total of 462 beds and cost 7-30 USD per person/night in the village, and 12 lodges that housed approximately 903 beds and cost 175-350USD per person per night (Harrison, Troëng, and assistants 2004). While most of the cabins are in the village, the lodges are located outside of the village proper.

The beach, the park (which includes forested land, a segment of the beach, short hiking trails, park management buildings, a dock and a visitor center), and the village (which includes restaurants, stores, cabins, footpaths, tour meeting points for village-based guides) are the main tourist attractions, and the spaces in which most tourists spend the bulk of their visit to the area looking for wildlife and enjoying the vistas. The beach, a dark volcanic sand beach with active shores littered with natural debris such as logs, seeds, and coconuts (among other types of marine debris), is a critical component of tourism to the area since it is the location for one of the most popular tourist events in Tortuguero: sea turtle nesting, the activity that turtle tours are designed to showcase. Tourists visit the beach primarily at night for turtle tours. While some visit during the
beach during the day, the beach is generally unsuitable for swimming and other beach activities. Tourists experience the park through canal tours, short hikes, stopping at the visitor center, and taking turtle tours on the part of the beach that lies within park boundaries. Tourists take tours through the village, stay in the village (cabina tourists), make purchases or dine there, and/or typically wait for transportation pick-ups there at some point during their stay.3

The economic benefits of tourism are evident in the village. For example, approximately 50 local people act as turtle guides, taking groups of tourists to see turtles at a cost of 5-25$ per tourist, and can earn significant income as such (Peskin 2002). WWF-Switzerland claims that 0.6 “direct jobs per room” are created by turtle tourism to Tortuguero, according to their consultants’ personal communications with the Costa Rican Tourism Institute. Troëng and Drews (2004) claim that “marine turtle tourism in Tortuguero is estimated at US$6,714,483 from board, lodging, and transportation services, as well as souvenir sales, national park and guided tour fees” (Troëng and Drews 2004). Factors such as these help to explain Tortuguero’s reputation for relative wealth and high standard of living compared to some surrounding areas in rural Costa Rica. Partly as a result of employment opportunities in tourism, the population has risen

3 Tortuguero is one of the largest marine turtle nesting beaches in the Western Hemisphere Bjorndal and Bolten 1992, Bjorndal et al. 1999).
from the 200s in the 1990s (Place 1991) to over 800 people at present (Jarquin and Gayle 2004). Recent immigrants to Tortuguero come from surrounding areas in Costa Rica, as well as from Nicaragua, Colombia, and other neighboring countries. In addition, a squatter’ settlement informally called el Cerro or San Francisco now exists to the north-west of the village, adjacent to its outskirts.

**The solid waste crisis**

Despite being a renowned ecotourism destination, the community of Tortuguero has been struggling with waste management problems in recent years (Camacho 2003; Meletis and Campbell 2007, see Chapter 1)\(^4\). Waste challenges in Tortuguero parallel the expansion of local tourism (with increased numbers of lodges and _cabinas_, rooms, and tourists) and related increases in village size. Associated increases in waste volumes, particularly of problematic wastes resulting from products popular with tourists such as batteries (hazardous) and bottled water (non-biodegradable plastic bottles), cannot easily be accommodated locally. A 2003 waste audit of the local ‘recycling plant’ found it unable to cope with the amounts and types of locally generated solid wastes, for a variety of reasons ranging from inadequate funding to a lack of functional on-site infrastructure and related expertise (Camacho 2003). Waste management shortcomings

\(^4\) There are also liquid waste management concerns in Tortuguero (e.g. septic tank leakage, improper sewage disposal, river pollution, leachate from illegal dumping) but these are not addressed in this paper.
included the lack of technical and managerial capacity to manage locally-generated solid wastes and the village’s geographically isolated location in a remote and wet part of the country, which separates it from possible sources of assistance, support, and financing. The local recycling plant and associated workers and administrators have had to deal with increasing amounts of waste, vocal local opposition and conflict, theft of equipment, repeated breakdown of key equipment such as the incinerator, non-payment of bills, and much more. There is also a pronounced lack of support from the regional municipality (Municipalidad de Pococi) and other related authorities (e.g. JAPDEVA, a state sponsored coastal development agency); promised assistance with respect to solid waste management has been inconsistent and unreliable. Some respondents claim, for instance that municipal authorities have told them that their solid waste responsibilities and services only extend to communities reachable by roads (there is no road into Tortuguero).

In 2002-2004, the shortcomings of local waste management infrastructure and resulting crises were clearly visible on the landscape. In Tortuguero, there are few places to ‘hide’ litter and garbage. As local infrastructure was overrun and the village experienced breakdowns in waste collection and disposal, residents coped by disposing of waste in a variety of unorthodox ways (lodges were also rumored to be doing so but evidence of such behaviors would be harder to find given that they are on private
property, outside of the village proper). Litter and exposed ‘clandestine’ dump sites were visible both in the village and on the beach (as Figures 2.2 and 2.3 illustrate), as was household burning of waste including plastics, metals, and other hazardous wastes. On the beach, dump sites become re-exposed as a result of beach erosion, exposure to the elements, beach traffic, and extracting sand for local construction (Camacho 2003). In addition to locally-generated solid waste, Tortuguero also receives debris (e.g. bottles and plastic bits) via ocean currents and tidal deposition. The beach therefore acts as a waste disposal area for those (illegally) burying village-generated waste in the sand, for those casually depositing trash on the beach, and for incoming waste from various places outside the village, including passing ships.
Figure 2.2: Trash from the beach and the village, as collected by volunteers (2004).
Figure 2.3: Waste lying on the ground in the village; note the non-biodegradables, the hazardous materials (batteries), and evidence of previously burned trash (2004).

Given the local solid waste crisis, we were interested in investigating if and how the solid waste crisis was penetrating the ecotourist gaze of visiting tourists. The next section explains the methods that we used to investigate tourist perceptions of key attractions, the environment, and the solid waste crisis in Tortuguero.
Methods

Tourist population and sampling

During two short visits (2002; 2004) and two longer field seasons (2003; 2004), Meletis lived in the village, engaged in participant observation with local residents and tourists, and conducted a tourist survey. We chose a survey for working with tourists, since it allowed us to collect data from a large number of tourists in a manner that didn’t demand too much of their time. Due to many sampling constraints (e.g. variable tourist arrival and departure schedules, hectic daily tourist schedules, weather-related restrictions, and inconsistent (researcher) access to transportation), Meletis used a combination of non-probability sampling methods. The most common sampling method she used was convenience sampling of tourists at lodges or cabinas during downtime or while they were waiting for transport or otherwise present and available in and around the village. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that both cabina and lodge tourists, as well as respondents of various ages and genders, were included. Snowball sampling also occurred when tourists suggested nearby friends and family as additional respondents.
The surveys were available in English, French, or Spanish5. The surveys were self-administered, but Meletis was typically available to make clarifications or answer questions. A total of 1001 (usable) surveys were collected in the summers of 2003 (519) and 2004 (482). Due to the hectic and opportunistic nature of the sampling, we cannot be certain of our response rate. However, most tourists asked to participate did so; based on the number of surveys distributed and collected in 2003, we estimate a response rate of 87%. The number of respondents varies for each question, as some respondents chose not to answer every question and undecipherable responses were removed for individual questions. We indicate the total number of respondents for each question when presenting results.

**Survey design and data collection**

The survey (Appendix A) was designed to collect demographic data from visiting tourists and to elicit tourist perceptions of Tortuguero. It consisted of closed questions about tourism demographics, travel motivations, and transportation type, and open-ended questions about tourist impressions of various components of the tourist experience at Tortuguero. Direct questions about the state of the environment and the local solid waste crisis were purposefully left out of the survey in order to allow such

5 Meletis obtained the permission of the owner or manager of each sampling location (e.g. lodges, restaurants), and the surveys included an introduction to the researcher, the institution (Duke), the research project, and projected data uses.
topics/concerns to emerge (or not) independently. The bulk of the data presented here were gathered using the multi-part question: “What is your overall impression of the following areas: The beach at Tortuguero; The village of Tortuguero; Tortuguero National Park; Tourism in Tortuguero” (see Appendix A). By using open-ended questions, we also hoped to get ‘rich description’ of queried features. Many respondents, however, responded with relatively short answers.

We were particularly interested in whether or not tourists would comment on the solid waste management crisis. We expected it to emerge as a theme in at least some responses due to its incongruous physical presence on the landscape, and we were particularly interested in:

- The number of tourists who would mention trash/litter/garbage;
- The locations in which tourists would notice trash/litter/garbage on the landscape (park, village, beach?) and the specific comments that they would make;
- The links, if any, tourists would make between the solid waste crisis and tourism/tourists;
- The links, if any, tourists would make between the solid waste crisis, the ethics of ecotourism, and the aesthetics of ecotourism;
- How tourist responses to the waste crisis would play out in the overall assessment of ecotourism in Tortuguero.

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6 In 2004, based on local actors’ recommendations, we added sections about the CCC, and turtle tours to this question. The data from these is largely absent from this paper and will be presented in a later paper.
Data analysis

Responses to closed ended questions about tourist demographics and motivations for visiting Tortuguero are presented as summary statistics. We have not attempted to look for statistical relationships between respondent characteristics and other views, both because of our non-random sampling strategy and because we were interested in views of ecotourism among ecotourists as a whole, rather than among individual sub-groups (e.g. by gender or nationality).

Open ended questions were coded thematically, using a combination of content analysis and grounded theory. The preliminary classification of the responses to questions about the beach, the village, the Park, and tourism was similar to those used in other studies of tourist perceptions (e.g. Dann 1996; Stamou and Paraskevopoulos 2003). We coded the overall tone of the response, classifying each response as negative (negative or neutral combined with negative), neutral (neutral remarks only; typically descriptive yet without clear direction: not positive or negative), positive (positive or neutral combined with positive), or mixed (responses that contained both positive and negative components). In addition to the overall response tone, we created categories of common themes for each question. We also noted when responses went beyond merely being descriptive, such as when respondents made suggestions, voiced concerns, or made normative/morality statements. We then counted and calculated percentages for
the different response tones (neutral, all positive, all negative, mixed: with positive and negative components) and for the categories representing common themes. In the sections that follow, we present both percentages of different responses and quotes illustrative of particular themes. Table 2.1 provides examples of how we coded survey responses.

Table 2.1: An illustration of the coding for overall response tone (neutral, positive, negative, or mixed), and response components (by common theme).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Tone</th>
<th>Categories/components</th>
<th>Additional notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R287 (2003)</td>
<td>Interesting to visit a black sand beach. Well maintained. Beautiful expanse of undeveloped beach.</td>
<td>positive</td>
<td>positive black sand; well maintained; beautiful</td>
<td>Tourist likes undeveloped nature of the beach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R255 (2003)</td>
<td>Not very attractive (understatement). Boring, dark, windy beach.</td>
<td>negative</td>
<td>not attractive; did not like; (others)</td>
<td>Negative; boring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R11 (2003)</td>
<td>It was great but there was a lot more trash than I though there would be.</td>
<td>mixed</td>
<td>nice/good; too much trash</td>
<td>Expectations: more trash than expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E415 (2004)</td>
<td>Very different from those Italian and other Caribbean.</td>
<td>neutral</td>
<td>(other)</td>
<td>Different from home.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Interpretation of codes**

For each of the general open-ended questions asked (beach, village, park, tourism, turtle tours, CCC), the most desirable coding, from a pro-tourism perspective (i.e. wanting tourism to continue and/or grow in the area) is positive, since one can assume that positive components are more likely to lead to positive word-of-mouth about Tortuguero. In this same sense, negative responses or mixed responses can be considered to be less desirable, and that they are more likely to result in negative word-of-mouth. Even neutral responses can be considered somewhat risky, since tourism is a highly competitive industry (Murphy, Pritchard, and Smith 2000).

**Results**

**Respondent demographics and travel characteristics**

Respondent characteristics are summarized in Tables 2.2 and 2.3. Due to the non-random sampling employed in our survey, these characteristics may not be representative of tourists visiting Tortuguero. They do, however, provide a description of our sample and allow for some comparison with characteristics of ecotourists described in the literature. Table 2.2 shows characteristics of respondent visits to Tortuguero. While we do not claim these characteristics as representative of all visitors to Tortuguero, they can be compared to previous studies on visitation (e.g. Lee and
Snepenger 1992). Our age categories were not set at conventional intervals. We were trying to isolate specific age groups of significance in the ecotourism literature, particularly the younger respondents (16-25) (e.g. represented in the backpacker population) and older tourists (51-60) and retirees (60+).
Table 2.2: Demographic profile of respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>954</td>
<td>43.6%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19-25</td>
<td>26-40</td>
<td>41-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>&gt;60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residency</td>
<td>974</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>854</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household income</td>
<td>759</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.3: Respondent travel characteristics (in %).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transportation</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Bus/boat</th>
<th>Boat</th>
<th>Air</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>998</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>963</td>
<td>Lodges</td>
<td>Cabins</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>69</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planned length of stay</td>
<td>998</td>
<td>0-1 days</td>
<td>2-3 days</td>
<td>4+ days</td>
<td>&gt;7 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of stay at time of survey</td>
<td>997</td>
<td>0-1 days</td>
<td>2-3 days</td>
<td>4+ days</td>
<td>&gt;7 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Tourist interests**

For triangulation purposes, we asked two questions about tourist interests.

When asked to choose from a set of options, tourists’ main reasons for coming to Tortuguero were: 1) ‘to visit Tortuguero National Park’ (54%), 2) ‘to go on a turtle walk’ (38%), and 3) ‘for a general visit’ (25%). A second (open-ended) question about tourist interests (‘what are you interested in seeing in Tortuguero?) yielded similar results, with turtles ranking as the most popular answer, and wildlife-related responses dominating. The answers identified by 10% or more of respondents (n=949) were:

1) turtles; sea turtles; turtle studies 69%
2) other animals; wildlife 51%
3) rainforest; trees; vegetation; jungle; plants 21%
4) nature; natural habitat; environment 13%
5) birds (separated out from other animals) 11%
6) the park 10%

---

7 Some tourists wrote more than one response. As a result, the percentages do not add up to 100.
8 Birds, as a response, was separated out from the other animal-related responses as birding tourists are often portrayed as a distinctive subset of ecotourists or nature tourists (Hvenegaard and Dearden 1998).
In contrast to enthusiasm for wildlife and the natural environment, only 9% of respondents mentioned a desire to see and/or learn about the local culture or people.

**Tourist perception of the beach**

Tourist responses about the beach (n=877) were almost evenly divided between negative responses, mixed responses (containing both positive and negative elements), and positive responses, with approximately one third of responses falling into each category⁹. Neutral answers represented less than 10% of tourist responses.

Many of the respondents wrote about the appearance of the beach. For example, the three most common coded sets of responses (trash/dirty 34%, general positive comments (nice, pretty, beautiful, good) 20%, and dangerous/wild/rough 17%) can all be interpreted as having strong aesthetic components. Furthermore, as the examples throughout this section will illustrate, much of language used in longer responses focused on the aesthetics or appearance of the beach.

In terms of positive responses, some respondents liked what they saw in terms of the state of the beach, for a variety of reasons:

*Well-kept, beautiful, peaceful (R108, 2003).*

*It is good that it is clean and that it doesn’t have too many tourists (S111, 2004).*

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⁹ The response breakdown held the same pattern in 2003 and 2004, there was no significant difference between the response patterns of each year.
An impressive combination of nature and tourism (development) (R97, 2003).

Others (negative or mixed responses) suggested that they were not impressed or satisfied with the state of the beach and/or its (perceived) management:

I was disappointed that it was not clean and pristine. I think that it should be more suitable to sunbathers (E117, 2004).

It’s pretty but it appears that the tourism is mismanaged (S122, 2004).

In commenting on the aesthetics of the beach, some respondents made reference to their pre-trip expectations. The responses contained pairs of themes similar to those found by MacKay and Fesenmaier (1997) that represent binary sets of descriptors/opinions, sometimes both appearing the same answer, such as:

Clean/dirty (esp. litter)
Natural/not natural (polluted)
Well managed/poorly managed; in need of attention
Crowded (especially turtle tours)/not crowded
Beautiful/ugly
Good for turtles/bad for turtles

For example, one respondent wrote: “Very nice. A little dirty (trash, bottles, etc.) but still quite a sight to behold (l444 2003)”, exhibiting evidence of the clean/dirty binary.

Some tourist answers exhibited confusion and/or disappointment about the general nature of the beach in terms of it being a ‘black’ (volcanic) beach, rather than a typical ‘Caribbean beach’ (e.g. with lighter sand beach).
Trash\textsuperscript{10} and perceived crowding, particularly with respect to turtle tours on the beach, emerged as key themes:

*It is quite dirty for being a protected area for the turtles. At night it is overcrowded by people, it seems that these disturb the turtles more than anything else* (R240, 2003).

*Dirty, very crowded. I think (that) because of the many tourists, including myself, I don’t see how the time and space (that) the turtles need is respected* (R261, 2003).

*It is pretty at night. Very overcrowded* (S119, 2004).

Approximately one third of the respondents (34\%) mentioned trash on the beach in their responses, without specific prompting (about trash/garbage/litter) in the survey. This should therefore be considered the minimum number of respondents per surveyed group per year who noticed the trash on the beach.

The responses below are examples of types of (negative) comments tourists wrote about trash on the beach:

*Beautiful and the edges seem to be used as a garbage dump* (SG13, 2003).

*The beach is littered with trash* (R167, 2003).

*There was lots of debris and garbage on the beach, along with a LOT of people* (R315, 2003).

*Disgustingly littered! Bags of trash on the beach and in the water- fishing lines, ropes, VCR tape, rotting food, flip flops, plastic toys, plastic bottles, glass, + plastic, plastic,*

\textsuperscript{10}Codes such as dirty, trash, garbage, and litter have been condensed to ‘trash’.
plastic! It seems like people must work harder to drag the bags to the beach than they would if they brought it to the dump (E063, 2004).

LOADS OF GARBAGE!! We saw the video (Steve Carr) in the Information Center. He would probably be horrified to see what became of the effort he put into it… (E113, 2004).

Conversely, only 10% of respondents wrote about the beach as being natural/untouched/virgin, and only 3% specifically mentioned that the beach was clean or well managed. They wrote comments such as:

*Very original and well cared for in order to not disturb the natural habitat of the turtles and the fauna and flora* (S156, 2004).

*The beach is well preserved and not influenced by humans* (E223, 2004).

Some respondents forwarded the opinion that the beach was relatively pristine while *simultaneously* mentioning the presence of garbage on the beach. For example, one person wrote: *Nice and mostly natural looking. A little spoiled by trash but not too bad. The turtles obviously like it* (E076, 2004).

In the comments of those who did choose to write about garbage or litter on the beach, disappointment was a common theme, as reflected in the following examples:

*The beach is for the turtles not the tourists, the turtles were amazing but (I was) disappointed in the amount of trash* (L395 2003).

*There seemed to be a lot of garbage on the beach- I saw two syringes- which was disappointing since I figured that with all the conservation efforts it would be clean* (L441 2003).
Very pretty- although I did notice there was a lot of trash/garbage on the beach, which was disappointing (E012, 2004).

I was disappointed that it was not clean and pristine. I think that it should be more suitable to sunbathers (E117, 2004).

Some respondents also expressed sadness, disgust or concern about the state of the beach and/or its potential impacts on turtles:

*The beach is really dirty and it’s a shame* (L380, 2004).

*Beautiful but the amount of trash concerns me* (R185, 2003).

*Dirty and too much wood debris for the turtles to nest safely* (R134, 2003).

*A beach that needs to be much better cared for and much cleaner, so that it doesn’t affect the turtle cycle of life* (S036, 2004).

In sum, the bulk of tourist responses regarding the beach were either negative or mixed; only 32% of responses were all-positive. Furthermore, aesthetics or the appearance of the beach featured prominently in the responses, and 34% of respondents wrote about trash on the beach. They also voiced general concerns about the beach being dirty and needing to be cleaned up, and other more specific concerns about the state of the beach it relates to turtles, although such specific concerns were fewer in number (e.g. in 2004 responses about the beach, only four respondents raised concerns regarding the ways in which turtle tours are conducted on the beach and three of these respondents had not and were not planning to participate in the tours).
Tourist perceptions of the village

Responses to the question about the village (n=864) had a more positive pattern than those regarding the beach: 41% were positive, 29% were negative, 18% were mixed, and 12% were neutral\(^\text{11}\). Respondents wrote both about the village (environment; appearance) and the people in the village. The most common (overall) written response about the village was short, positive, and non-specific such as: nice, cool, cute, beautiful, charming, or good (26%); as with the beach question, many of these short positive answers and others suggest an aesthetic evaluation of some kind (e.g. pretty; charming; cute). The second most common response (19%) was similar but specifically indicated the people as a positive element of the village, using terms such as friendly, welcoming, or nice. Respondents also wrote about the atmosphere as being laidback, peaceful or tranquil. A few respondents commented specifically on the peaceful location and the lack of cars as being a positive component of this atmosphere (2%). Examples of positive comments about the village include:

*Friendly, sufficient, proud of who and where they are* (L 161, 2003).

*Cozy little town. The people are very friendly here compared to many other tourist places in Costa Rica* (L25, 2003).

\(^{11}\) Despite the fact that many tourists (especially lodge tourists) spend little time in the village, only 14% of respondents chose not to comment on the village and similarly, only 12% of respondents who did comment on the village wrote neutral comments.
It is very cordial (L428, 2004).

Quaint. I love that there are no cars (R172, 2003), and Very touristy but friendly (L198, 2004).

While most responses about village inhabitants were positive and short, 10% of respondents wrote about poverty and dependency and/or questioned where the tourism revenue was going since the village appeared to be so poor.

I was very surprised by the “borderline” Third World poverty in town. It was a little depressing to see the housing and blighted neighbourhoods. L91 2004.


Respondents also wrote about the natural and built environments in the village. In some of the negative descriptions or negative components of mixed responses, tourists mention specific (perceived) problems. These included: the rundown appearance of village buildings or the overall lack of maintenance of the village, problems with the paths (e.g. flooding; paths turning to mud; the lack of paved paths), and problems with stray dogs. A sample mixed response is: “Looks dilapidated, friendly
There were also a few (less than 10%) complaints about local service, prices, or information availability.

As with the beach, trash emerged as a common theme, the third most common (overall) theme in the village-related responses. Fifteen percent of respondents wrote that the village was dirty or messy and/or specifically mentioned the presence of litter, garbage, or other related problems in the village. Negative comments regarding trash in the village included the following:

I don’t like it. It’s muddy and has a lot of trash on the paths. Hard to get around, nothing to see in the town. My LEAST favorite part of Costa Rica (R211, 2003).

Nice village- but too much garbage in the streets (R276, 2003).

Filthy- could have been beautiful if some effort was made to clean up plastic and other garbage. The people too seem jaded and at the very least, indifferent to the tourism that supposedly supports their local economy (R134, 2003).

As in the responses to the beach-related question, responses suggested that respondents were comparing the village that they saw with what they expected from an ecotourist destination. For example, in describing the village, one respondent wrote: “For an ecotourist destination, it was super dirty (trash)” (R308, 2003). Another one echoed the sentiment: “Original houses, TOO DIRTY for a village that wants too live on ECOTOURISM, plastics around, cans… DISGUSTING!” (E002, 2004). There were also respondents, however, who did not comment on the trash in the village, or downplayed
it, suggesting instead that the village was indeed exhibiting the characteristics of an ecotourism community, appearing to be ‘in tune with nature’: 

*Gives the perception of being a self-sufficient community that is not into mass tourism but in a symbiotic relationship with (the environment) (R170, 2003)*

*Friendly people, tranquil nature-loving village (R89, 2003)*;

*Essential. Respecting nature (E415, 2004).*

Concerns for authenticity were evident in a few responses (6% wrote about the village as being authentic; 6% wrote that there was too much tourism). Some respondents suggested Tortuguero was authentic:

*Charming, little village that has not lost its distinctiveness despite the influences of tourism (R207, 2003)*

*It is a very nice site and I like it because the local customs and lifestyles are being kept; uncivilized (R194, 2003).*

Others were concerned about the ability to maintain authenticity in the face of tourism: “Be careful to keep the character of the village. Not too many cement lodges” (F018, 2004). Others chose to write about elements that ‘didn’t fit’ with the rest of Tortuguero. For example, several people commented on the large artificial parrots raised on posts in front of the largest souvenir shop: “The two giant bird sculptures! They’re hideous!” (E061,
A few respondents (6%) also suggested that Tortuguero has become ‘too touristy’
to be considered authentic:

A tourist trap. Very littered (R181, 2003)

Very touristy, I didn’t really like it because it seemed very geared toward tourists to the
point that local culture was lost (R323, 2003).

Not very authentic; excessively dependent on tourism (R58, 2003).

Very exposed to tourism; lacks intimacy (L449, 2004).

Similarly, several respondents alluded to ecotourism’s zooification\textsuperscript{12} of village
residents and their own uncomfortable roles in this process as tourists:

Nice but it felt as though the people were just being looked at as exhibits (L379, 2003)

It maybe good for local people to take money directly from tourists but otherwise my visit
seemed rather an intrusion into people’s lives. (L377, 2003)

I wonder how the people who live here and serve the tourism industry feel about basically
having no privacy in their homes. I do like the village. L233 (2003)

Poor, but cautiously friendly. People must be sick of tourists looking at them. L106
(2004)

In sum, the village received more positive responses that the beach (41% vs. 32%
positive), but responses also included concerns about the aesthetics or appearances of

\textsuperscript{12} Zoofication is a term used to describe the process by which local people living in or adjacent to a tourist
attraction also become a part of the attraction (Mowforth and Munt 1998).
the village and local environment (rundown; dilapidated; dirty; trash), poverty, and pressures of tourism on authenticity. Trash was the most common negative comment (15% of respondents). Overall, however, respondents wrote positively about the village and/or the people they met within it.

**Tortuguero National Park**

In contrast to the questions about the beach and the village, views of the park were overwhelmingly positive, with 84% of comments categorized as positive. In addition, most of the positive responses, particularly the short ones, were very positive, such as: “Is very very very nice, beautiful, special, impressive!” (L190, 2004), and “It is the best that I have ever visited and we have visited a lot!” (L371, 2004). Short positive responses included words such as: amazing, awesome, excellent, fantastic, wonderful and great. In contrast with the beach and village responses, few wrote about tourist expectations regarding the park, and only 5% of the responses were negative (2003-2004). Once again, the most common park-related coded sets of answers (great/extremely pretty/beautiful/amazing/fantastic/impressive/wonderful: 72.6%; pure/wild/natural/full of wildlife/ lots of animals/wildlife: 22.2%) suggest a strong aesthetic component.

In the more detailed responses, three themes dominate, with the last type being the least common of the three:
1) the park as attractive (especially regarding the ability to see animals) (e.g. *The park was beautiful and a pristine environment filled with wonderful sights.*L133, 2004);

2) the park as natural, or more specifically, well managed (e.g. *Beautiful, very impressed in the Costa Rican governments’ efforts to protect the environment.*L36, 2003);

3) the park as having management issues or challenges (e.g. *Wild and beautiful! I have a feeling that far more rangers are necessary. We spent several hours in quiet peace among the canals* L119, 2004).

Over twenty percent of respondents (22%) wrote about the park as pure, wild, or natural, often highlighting the plants and animals in the park, as these examples indicate:

*A lot of animals. Most beautiful place I’ve ever been* (L109, 2004).

*Beautiful-loved seeing all of the wildlife* (L127, 2004)

*Much richer in wildlife than I expected* (L129, 2003)

*Very pretty, fauna and flora rich* (L322, 2004).

*Good, the park is full of varieties of bird species, and trees, and animals: monkeys, caiman, etc.* (L476, 2004).

Ideas of the park as untouched (Edenic environment) also surfaced in some responses:

*Gorgeous and pristine* (L95, 2003).

*Beautiful rainforest: trees, vines, diverse waters, amazing animals, untouched environment* (L89, 2004)
We enjoyed the visitor center and were impressed with the untouched environment and abundant wildlife (L114, 2004).

By contrast, only a small percentage of respondents (4%) contemplated possible negative environmental impacts of tourism or other problems in their park-related answers. Furthermore, even when responses did include mention of (perceived) negative impacts, they typically included a positive element as well (and were categorized as mixed), as these examples illustrate:

- Really big, bit too affected by tourism, maybe, lots of boats and lodges but the wildlife is good (L194, 2004).
- Really neat- I did object to the fact that our guide fed the caiman (L113, 2003).
- The park was nicely laid out with a wonderful trail. I love how the forest just pours out onto the beach! However, the entrance to the park was confusing and the signs along the trail that don’t make sense (L13, 2003).
- I saw more wildlife here than in any other park I visited in Costa Rica. The motor boats and planes are disruptive though (L28, 2003).
- Excellent, but also seems under a lot of pressure (L67, 2003).

Park-related problems or shortcomings mentioned in this small number of tourist responses included concerns regarding park management, the lack of available information to tourists in the park, trail-related complaints (re: length; quality), and motor-boat related complaints including noise-related concerns (e.g. possibly disturbing
wildlife), water pollution concerns, and concerns about boat operators driving in unsafe ways. Negative comments regarding tourism development or tourist crowding surfaced in park-related answers as well, although to a lesser degree than in other questions. Motor boat-related complaints were among the most common (cited by 2.5% of respondents). For example, one respondent wrote: One of the best nature preserves I have visited but the growing mass tourism (motorized boats especially) are going to be a problem (L66, 2004). Some tourists (and some locally-living people as well) would like to see motors outlawed or required to be electric within the park (participant observation 2002-2004). In total, only 1% of respondent answers about the park contemplated the relationship between negative environmental impacts or problems and Tortuguero’s future.

Similarly, very few respondents included suggestions about how to improve the park or how to deal with perceived problems. Common suggestions included improving: trails, information availability, park management, enforcement and park staffing, and reducing or banning the use of motor boats in the park. Even when suggestions were made about how to improve the park, however, the responses tended to be mixed rather than all negative. As these examples illustrate, many of the suggestions were geared towards improving the tourist experience in the park:

Love the birds and wildlife. Not enuf trails (L97, 2004).

Beautiful, still 'wild'! Should keep it this way by LIMITING some tours and NO ROAD (L176, 2004).
Wet! It is so beautiful and lush. I LOVE the canals. I might suggest some boardwalks (L266, 2004).

Beautiful but would like more ranger tours; willing to pay for (L300, 2004).

Fine. Educational boards and information about the park must be updated (L250, 2003).13

In general, respondents had good things to say about the park; their responses suggest that they liked the way it looked and the animals and plants that they saw within it. Of the few who did write about problems in the park, motor boat related concerns was one of the most common responses. Crowding and trash did not feature prominently in response to the park-related question.

**Respondent perceptions of tourism in Tortuguero**

Responses to the questions about impressions of tourism in Tortuguero were mixed, and suggest some confusion regarding the meaning of the question. While we were interested in overall impressions of tourism, some respondents provided comments on services, either in a general fashion (e.g. good shops and restaurants) or in a very specific way, commenting on the quality of food or accommodation at their lodge. Some focused on levels of tourism, and some on generalities. Because of the diversity of

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13 The information boards in the park’s visitor center were updated the following year, in 2004.
responses, we have not attempted to group them as positive, negative, mixed and neutral; since they address a wide variety of issues, this categorization isn’t very useful. Rather, we highlight the binary response sets for specific issues. Those that emerged are:

- Tortuguero as not having too much tourism (10%)
- Tortuguero as having too many tourists or too much tourism (24%)
- Positive comments about services (17%)
- Negative comments about services (11%)
- The tourism as being ‘eco-positive’ (tourism as environmentally-sound) (6%)
- The tourism as ‘eco-negative’ (tourism damaging the environment) (3%)
- Tortuguero as welcoming (4%)
- Tortuguero as unwelcoming (1%)

As with responses to questions about the beach and the village, the size of the tourism industry and potential impacts on authenticity emerge as important issues. While 10% of respondents were not concerned about the size of the industry (e.g. “I like that the tourism is not so big, better for the natural environment” (415 2003)), 24% were concerned:

- Just the right number of tourists, no more please! (370 2003)
- Increased from two years ago; becoming too popular I think (E347 2004)
- Too much for a natural zone (S069 2004).
One respondent (exhibiting a rare type of response), voiced concerns about tourism’s potential negative impacts on turtles, but also rationalized the crowding in terms of its potential ability to help conserve the turtles: *I wasn’t a fan of the large groups crowding the turtles, but if their money (funds) conservation of the turtles*… (E070 2004). The theme of authenticity also surfaced in relation to respondent fears of what could happen if tourism increases:

*I think that there is too much tourism and that it is becoming a village that is too exposed to tourism, and that it is loosing its ‘magic’* (S132 2004)

*Tourism and conservation need each other, but it is easy to see how things can get out of control here. Hopefully development is carefully monitored, but I can imagine concessions here and there will degrade the park* (617 2003).

*Developing: shouldn’t increase too much for fear of ‘de-naturalizing’ the site* (445 2003).

Trash or garbage appeared in very few responses to this question, and was not directly linked to tourism or its expansion, as this example illustrates:

*There are a lot of people (tourists). But the main problem is that it is starting to have garbage in its rivers* (494 2003).

While the varied interpretation of this question by respondents makes results hard to analyze, the most common response to this question was that there was too much tourism in Tortuguero. Also, while respondents raised concerns about the potential impacts of tourism and its growth on both the environment and the village, the
bulk of their answers did not include connections between the tourists themselves and their observations, concerns, or fears.

**What tourists liked the most and least about Tortuguero**

The survey included two questions that asked tourists what they like the most and the least about Tortuguero. These were included to solicit information on particular points of tourist appreciation and tourist dissatisfaction; the information was collected to be returned to interested parties in the village and to test whether or not trash and other such themes would resurface here. These two questions were also used for triangulation- to see if themes (e.g. main interests; expectations; concerns) from other questions would reappear here. For example, we were interested in finding out whether or not trash would appear among the ‘things that tourists liked the least’.

The things respondents identified as ‘liking most’ about Tortuguero reflect their reasons for visiting, as identified in responses discussed earlier: wildlife and nature-related features were ‘most liked.’ The features most commonly identified as ‘most liked’ were (n=981):

1) animals or wildlife 21%
2) turtles or turtle tours 19%
3) nature 16%
4) canals/river 14%
5) vegetation or jungle 9%
5) village 9%
Respondents also commented on Tortuguero’s location and surroundings, especially its connection to canals and waterways, and its relative isolation and lack of roads and cars: *Its location between the canals and the ocean* (S170, 2004); *Life with no cars* (E013, 2004). Some respondents also contrasted Tortuguero with other more crowded destinations: *It is not overly touristy, like Manuel Antonio* (E061 2004).

Approximately 9% of the respondents claimed that there was nothing that they did not like about Tortuguero, suggesting that they were satisfied with their experience to date, despite any complaints they included in other parts of the survey. Among those who did identify ‘least liked’ features, the five most common answers were (n=932):

1) Climate (rain, heat, humidity)  
   21%
2) Trash or garbage  
   15%
3) Bugs  
   10%
4) Specific service-related complaints  
   10%
5) Too much tourism  
   9%

Trash re-surfaced in this question, as the second most common response (14.9%). Other environmental concerns re-appeared here as well, such as motor-boat-related complaints and concerns about pollution (noise pollution, water pollution), disturbances to animals and their habitat, and using motor boats in the canals. Some tourists (9.4%) also used this question to express concerns about the amount of tourism in Tortuguero; they wrote phrases such as: *“That it could start to lose itself because of tourism”* (S170, 2004). They also raised concerns about current and future levels of tourism being too much for
the environment to bear. Some (2.4%) were particularly concerned about there being ‘too much tourism’ for the turtles to withstand. New types of responses appeared in this section as well, such as more conventional tourism-related complaints about service-related issues such as plumbing, hotel infrastructure or rooms, or the food being served at the lodges. Complaints about the climate (21%) and about bugs (10%) also surfaced, suggesting dissatisfaction with components of the natural environment in Tortuguero. These new additions make some interesting suggestions about the types of tourists visiting Tortuguero and we will return to these in the discussion.

Discussion

Who are the tourists to Tortuguero during the green turtle nesting season and what are they interested in seeing in Tortuguero?

We recognize that our sample was non-random and that it included only green turtle season tourists. Nonetheless, we contemplate what the demographics and tourist interest responses we collected (might) suggest about tourists to Tortuguero, as compared with existing ecotourist profiles for Tortuguero and beyond.

Various case studies of ecotourist profiles and claims and counterclaims about the demographics of ecotourists have been made in the literature in recent years (e.g. Grossberg, Treves, and Naughton-Treves 2003; Wight 1996a; Hvenegaard and Dearden 1998; Weaver and Lawton 2002; Wight 1996b). There is agreement that most ecotourists
are North Americans and Europeans, and that they tend to be more educated and come from higher income levels than mass tourists (Hvenegaard, Butles, and Krystofiak 1989; Kellert 1985; Ziffer 1989 cited in Hvenegaard and Dearden 1998, 702; Mowforth and Munt 1998). Ecotourists range, however, in ‘style’ of travel, from backpackers to exclusive lodge goers (Weaver and Lawton 2002), and there is contradictory evidence regarding age: "For example, nature tourists have been said to be older than the average tourist (Boo 1990; Backman and Potts 1993; Eagles and Cascagnette 1995); younger than the average tourist (Yuan and Moisey 1992; Chudintra 1993); 54 years on average (Fennell and Smale 1992). . . ." (Wight 1996a, 4). In Wight’s 1996 study, she suggests that experienced Canadian ecotourists are generally older, with 56% of her respondents ranging in age from 35 to 54 years old (Wight 1996a).

Even though our sample was non-random, the demographic data collected matches common profiles described in the literature. In general, our respondents were highly educated and/or professionals with either high household income levels (over 80,000 USD) or low household income levels (under 30,000 USD)\(^{14}\), corresponding with the types of tourists (higher-end lodge-staying ecotourists and lower-end "cabina-staying\(^{\text{cabina-staying}}\))

\(^{14}\) Both lodge tourists and "cabina-staying" tourists (e.g. backpackers) were surveyed and these results were not disaggregated for the purposes of this paper, despite the fact that they might represent different patterns of responses. Disaggregating the data by accommodation type and/or household income levels could provide an interesting further level of analysis for a future paper.
ecotourists, budget travelers or backpackers) that Tortuguero seeks to accommodate. Most were from North American (40%) and Europe (56%). These demographics also reflect national statistics regarding international arrivals (Costa Rica Tourism Board (ICT) 2006). Interestingly, the retiree age group (61+) did not figure prominently in our sample (3%) despite ecotourism’s association with older tourists (e.g. Wight 1996a); the sample was dominated by younger age groups, with 26-40 being the largest group (43%) and 19-25 being the second largest (18%). Some have suggested that Latin America remains geared towards ‘hardier tourists’ (Zebich-Knos in press); Tortuguero’s remote location and distance from roads and other essential services (e.g. hospitals) do make it among Costa Rica’s attractions that are more ‘off the beaten path’, which might help to explain the younger demographic.

Despite changes in the size and diversity of the population of tourists that visit Tortuguero, the park, wildlife (and more specifically turtle) viewing and general nature experiences are the primary interests of tourists visiting Tortuguero. In spite of the fact that tourism has increased dramatically since the early 1990, these results mirror those found by Lee and Snpenger (1992). Of tourists they surveyed, most stayed 2-3 nights, 90% came to observe specific plants and animals (including turtles) and 70% wanted to visit the rainforest. Similar to our results, local culture was identified by a much smaller percentage (15%) of visitors as an attraction. What ecotourists want has changed very
little in over a decade. The focus remains on nature rather than culture and more specifically, on particular species of animals and plants, such as turtles, a main interest in our results.

These results fit with other ecotourist surveys in which wildlife and ‘pristine nature’ were found to be primary interests (Akama 1996). Ecotourists to Khao Yai National Park in Thailand, for instance, reported wildlife-viewing as the most important part of ecotourist trips (Hvenegaard and Dearden 1998). Similarly, in Wight’s (1996b) study of North American ecotourist preferences, she found that despite the variety of interests and activities reported by ecotourists, “a wilderness setting was the most important feature for the experienced ecotourism traveler, followed by wildlife viewing, hiking/trekking, and visiting national park/protected area” (Wight 1996b, 5). Local culture was much less important. Thus, ecotourism remains largely biocentric, focused on wildlife (especially charismatic mega fauna) and landscapes, rather than cultural interests (e.g. Grosspietsch 2006). Our study adds to challenges of Boo’s original assumption that ecotourists would be ‘naturally’ interested in local culture as well (Boo 1990).

Our data therefore, helps to ‘complicate’ stereotypes about ecotourists- our data set reveals varied demographics in terms of ages, income levels and nationalities and to a certain degree, calls into question time spent on categorizing tourist types rather than
accepting them as heterogeneous groups. Our survey results show uniform interests (the park, nature, wildlife) *despite* the varied demographics and the types of tourists that they might represent (e.g. mass tourists; ecotourists and/or mass ecotourists). This interesting mix of diversity and commonality suggests that our efforts might be better spent accepting diversity within tourist categories (e.g. within the ecotourist) and investigating similarities and potential overlaps between mass tourists and harder ecotourists for example, and considering the challenges of managing for such diversity.

For example, in considering the different types of tourists being received at this one ecotourism destination, we must ask ourselves how a destination can offer both harder and softer ecotourist activities, aesthetics, and service bases in the same place (especially when it is a small place, like Tortuguero), without compromising the ideal ecotourism aesthetic of each group? Respondents’ answers suggest that Tortuguero may be having trouble doing this- keeping its authentic ‘rustic’ feel while also managing increasing numbers of package-type ecotourists who expect the creature comforts of home and higher-end accommodations; some respondents picked up on questions of authenticity regarding the destination’s expanding tourist numbers and built form, while other complained that parts of Tortuguero were not ‘developed enough’, revealing conflicting aesthetic expectations for Tortuguero among visiting tourists.
Respondent perceptions of the local environment in general

Respondent perceptions of the environment of Tortuguero make certain suggestions about the tourist gaze and the ways in which it operates and is disturbed in Tortuguero. For one, ‘nature’ and the park are key respondent interests. Both the romantic gaze and the spectatorial gaze are reflected in respondent answers; respondents wrote about sights they saw (e.g. animals, plants) and about nature being various combinations of pure and natural, and/or polluted. Concerns regarding authenticity and comments regarding tourist disappointment (e.g. regarding the state of the beach) reveal that tourists are comparing the Tortuguero environment that they experience, with notions of what they think it should be.

The beach got mixed reviews in respondent answers; it was seen as beautiful and dirty, pure and polluted, sometimes all at once. Respondents commented on the trash and perceived crowding as negative components of the beach, offering the unsurprising suggestion that crowding and trash do not fit with tourist expectations for the beach in Tortuguero. When respondents did raise concerns about the beach, they were primarily aesthetic (e.g. the trash makes the beach look dirty) and to a lesser degree, environmental (e.g. the trash poses risks to turtles). Some respondents were also confused about the beach (e.g. why was it covered in dark sand rather than white sand) and others found that the beach did not have much to offer to tourists since, for
example, swimming is not recommended (because of the presence of strong rip tides, sharks and large underwater debris). Responses suggest that the beach is viewed primarily as a place for turtles, not people.

Responses about the park, on the other hand, were overwhelmingly positive. This is not surprising if we consider the fact that the park is 1) a site with severely restricted human use (e.g. little possibilities of trash being generated in the park) and 2) because it is a site in which tourists are likely to experience what they came for (according to the literature, and their own responses): nature and animals. The park therefore manages to satisfy both the romantic gaze by providing opportunities to be in awe of local canals, vegetation and animals, and the spectatorial gaze through group viewing opportunities and through offering desired signs and signifiers of the ‘Costa Rica jungle experience’, such as particular animals (e.g. toucans; monkeys). In the park, the focus is on directing and satisfying the ecotourist gaze; tourists are led through canals in boats or canoes and with the help of guides, find the sights they have been looking for. Furthermore, the park is undeveloped (it only has a few buildings and a short trail) and ‘natural looking’, so it fits well with the ecotourism aesthetic and accommodates the ecotourist gaze. There are no inhabitants within the park and the only other people ecotourists are likely to see are other tourists, guides, and park rangers, all of whom (as long as there is no perceived crowding) fit with the gaze.
The village does not fit easily within the ecotourist gaze because it satisfies neither the romantic nor the spectatorial gaze. The village in Tortuguero is a working village, it has not been ‘aestheticized’ for tourism (Mowforth and Munt 1998), with a ‘backstage’ to accommodate basic services such as waste disposal, local houses and services used, and everyday life. Its built landscape reflects its marketed image to a certain degree: its paths and streets are mostly unpaved, it offers greenspace and wildlife viewing, and many of its buildings are decorated with toucans, turtles, and jungle images. A the same time, the village remains an actual living, working community, however, with ‘real problems’ such as infrastructural shortcomings and some social problems (e.g. drug use and vagrancy) that are sometimes out in plain tourist view. The village is also the space in which tourists are likely to encounter the greatest numbers of people (residents and tourists). People, especially large groups of tourists, are an element of the ‘landscape’ not typically represented in the promotional literature for Tortuguero, for Costa Rica or for ecotourism in general. Furthermore, the ecotourist gaze is not as directed as it is in the park; while some tourists might experience it as part of a village tour, many experience the village without a guide, for at least a certain amount of time, allowing them to wander and observe independently. While a certain degree of catering to the tourist gaze does occur in the village (e.g. restaurants and stores painted with images of turtles and other wildlife; restaurants and
cabinas that include hammocks, gardens, and thatched roofs), people’s houses and other businesses are designed to suit the needs of the locally-living people rather than the tourists.

**Respondents noticed trash on the beach and in the village and blamed local people**

Despite the heterogeneous nature of tourist responses to the survey questions and the lack of any question asking about trash, trash was one of the most prominent themes. It surfaced in approximately a third of the responses about the beach and it was the second most common response (15%) to the question ‘What did you like the least about Tortuguero?’ Respondents wrote about trash in response to the questions about the beach, the village, tourism, and what they liked the least, but not in answering the question about the park. This is ironic because the park is inextricably linked to the ecotourism industry that is generating the bulk of the trash; as stated by the respondents themselves, the park is a main attraction for ecotourism to Tortuguero. Therefore in some way, the existence of the park has led to waste generation on-site by tourists, although respondents do not see it this way. In contrast, many of the local respondents do (see Chapter 3, this thesis).
If we consider the four main ways in which the ecotourist gaze can be disrupted according to Urry (2002) and Ryan et al. (2000), our respondent answers reveal the following:

1) *technological landscape guilt*: Most respondents did not report feelings of technological landscape guilt associated with their own on-site generation of wastes or their roles in local tourism. Respondents who did write about blame rather pointed fingers at the locally-living people (not the tourism industry; not themselves). In this sense, tourists were detached from the ‘technological landscape guilt’ regarding the waste crisis in Tortuguero and viewed it as a local waste management failing that did not fit well with ecotourism, aesthetically or environmentally. The only place in tourist responses where a common connection appears to have been made between tourism (but not tourists as individuals) and a negative impact was in some complaints about motor boat use in the park.

2) *elevated levels of perceived risk or danger*: Respondents did not allude to human health risks associated with the waste crisis, either for tourists or locally-living people. For the few that did mention specific waste-related risks, the focus was on risks to turtles (e.g. how a dirty beach might affect turtle nesting). Danger
and risk did arise as a theme with respect to concerns about tourist numbers, tourism growth and crowding, however. Some suggested that continued growth would put Tortuguero at risk. The focus here was typically on the destination’s authenticity rather than ecological health, but some did raise concerns about the impact of on-the-beach crowding on turtles.

3) components of the mundane or everyday (tourist) life: Despite the fact that trash and waste management are a part of the mundane and everyday life, respondents were disturbed by trash on the landscape but did not report feeling connected to the problem.

4) other violations of the ecotourism aesthetic or ethic: Comments about disappointment and unmet expectations (e.g. regarding the appearance of the beach or regarding perceived crowding) suggest that trash on the landscape is interpreted by some respondents as evidence of Tortuguero not meeting some of its aesthetic and environmental expectations. A common type of answer, for example, reported that Tortuguero had too much trash or was too dirty for an ecotourism destination.
**Respondents failed to make connections between tourists, tourism and trash**

As hinted at in the previous section, virtually all respondents failed to write about the connection between the trash that they saw, tourism to the area, and their own role in it. This fits with other components of the survey that question how ‘educated and aware’ tourists to Tortuguero are. For example, while most respondents were surveyed on their last or second to last day of their stay in Tortuguero, few respondents chose to make direct comments about the educational value of their trip to Tortuguero, few wrote about things that they had learned. The focus was rather on what they had seen (or not seen) and the appearance (aesthetics) of the beach, the park, and in the village.

Although concerns about tourism’s impact on the environment appeared in some responses, such remarks were far less prevalent than respondent comments on aesthetics. Respondents tended to use generalized statements about certain elements of tourism needing to be improved, and when respondents raised concerns about the local environment (especially trash) or tourism in the area (notably regarding the numbers of tourists to Tortuguero), they exhibited detachment from these impacts in that they did not include themselves as part of the ‘impact-generating equation’. The fact that the collected responses exhibit little concern for tourists’ own involvement in perceived problems calls into question their ‘ecotourist intentions’, and fits with the work of others.
who have suggested that ecotourism remains a hedonistic activity at heart; traveling to exotic lands and gazing upon exotic signs and signifiers such as ‘natural’ landscapes and the wildlife within them (Ryan, Hughes, and Chirgwin 2000). Similar lacks of connections between tourists and observed impacts have been reported by other authors; “previous studies on the perceptions of the environmental impacts of tourism have often concluded that tourists are not very perceptive of their own effects on the visited areas, or that what they do notice are primarily the direct impacts (like rubbish and vandalism) of other tourists” ((Lucas 1970; Manning 1985; Lime 1986) cited in Hillery et al. 2001).

**Respondents were concerned about crowding, growth and authenticity**

While the word ‘authentic’ was only present in few tourist responses to various questions, authenticity did surface in answers to various survey questions, most notably those about the village, and tourism. Respondents raise concerns about the village’s authenticity and Tortuguero’s ability to remain authentic in the face of continued growth; the scale of visitation seems to putting respondent perceptions of authenticity at risk. The park also seems to be judged as authentic in that no concerns or complaints about authenticity (save concerns re: motor boats) appear in park-related responses. The degree to which trash seems to have permeated respondent gazes and their comments
about being disappointed about the presence of trash in the village and on the beach suggest that trash is detracting from the destination’s authenticity, as well.

Concerns about the levels of tourism in Tortuguero are found throughout the respondent response set. For example, in response to the question specifically about tourism, 24% of respondents (n=848) suggested that Tortuguero might have too much tourism or too many tourists, while only 10% wrote the opposite. Furthermore, crowding surfaced in responses about the local turtle tours, especially in response to the beach question. Finally, ‘too much tourism’ emerged as the fifth most common answer about what respondents liked the least about tourism in Tortuguero. Furthermore, although the new turtle tour system put in place in 2004 might have been hypothesized to reduce perceived crowding on the beach, our results do not reflect such a change, as results regarding crowding were similar for both years. All of this suggests that Tortuguero’s tourism-related actors should address crowding as an aesthetic impact and a potential creator of environmental impacts as well. The prevalence of crowding and tourism-related concerns in the surveys suggests that for some respondents, the perceptual carrying capacity of tourism in Tortuguero was being exceeded in terms of tourism numbers. If efforts are unlikely to be made to reduce the number of tourists to Tortuguero, then perhaps management should work to reduce perceived crowding by
creating more separate tourist spaces or routes so that there tourists are more dispersed in space and time.

Interestingly, respondents did not make many direct links between concerns about tourism numbers and growth and undesirable environmental impacts, such as the waste crisis. For the few who did extend their discussions of concerns beyond writing ‘too many tourists’ or ‘too much tourism’, their concerns were related to Tortuguero’s authenticity or charm being at risk, rather than its ecological environment. This further suggests that respondents’ primary concerns were with their own tourist experience (hedonism) and the aesthetics and authenticity of Tortuguero as an ecotourism destination, rather than with the ecological integrity of the site. One exception would be the respondents who wrote about particular concerns about how tourist overcrowding on the beach might be creating potential threats to turtles (e.g. nest disturbances).

**Respondents were satisfied despite the aesthetic and environmental shortcomings cited, raising interesting questions about tourism to Tortuguero**

Despite patterns that emerged regarding complaints, concerns, and disappointments that surfaced, respondents remained largely satisfied with their trips to Tortuguero, according to their surveys. For instance, despite the beach receiving a somewhat negative review in the surveys and the village question producing a mixed set of results, neither turned up as prominent answers in terms of what respondents
liked the least. Respondent-reported main interests (animals/wildlife, turtles and turtle
tours, nature, canals/river, and the jungle vegetation) all seemed to meet tourist
expectations given that they were common components of answers about what
respondents liked the most. The village residents also appeared (9% of 981 responses) as
a component of their Tortuguero visits that respondents liked the most- this despite the
fact that people/culture was not among top respondent interests.

Overall respondent satisfaction is also suggested by what respondents ‘liked the
least’. Firstly, 9% of respondents answered ‘nothing’, suggesting that they liked
everything in Tortuguero. Apart from trash, specific service-related complaints, and
concerns about there being too much tourism, the most common complaints had to do
with physical conditions of the local natural environment (climate-related complaints;
bugs) and not tourism-related shortcomings. Complaints about the local climate (mostly
related to heat, humidity and rainfall) are interesting because: 1) the respondents are
supposed to be ecotourists (that is how Tortuguero is marketed) and therefore more
tolerant of difficult climactic conditions etc., and 2) the very climactic conditions that
they claim to ‘like the least’ combine to create the environment that houses the fauna
and flora that they ‘like the most’. Their climate and service-related comments are
interesting in that they are reminiscent of more traditional tourism and tourists and in
that you cannot have the landscape and wildlife that Tortuguero is so famous for without its tropical rainforest climate (heat, humidity, rain, and yes, bugs).

The fact that most respondents could have satisfactory tourism experiences in Tortuguero despite a waste crisis clearly being visible on the landscape (sometimes including high degrees of open dumping, litter on the landscape, and obvious burning of trash) also raises some interesting questions about the respondents. How did they reconcile the visible signs of the solid waste crisis with the rest of the sights seen? Will its appearance on the landscape factor in to their word-of-mouth tales about traveling to Tortuguero and if so, what role will it play? Will their overall vacation-related satisfaction (hedonistic reward) override their concerns about local environments and apparent management shortcomings?

These are important given that travel accounts of friends and family are key influences on future trips and tourists’ expectations for destinations that they choose to visit (Grosspietsch 2006; Chaudhary 2000). The quality of the environment and the atmosphere of a destination are important for the perceived value of a destination/trip and for positive word of mouth (Murphy, Pritchard, and Smith 2000). The combinations of tourist responses captured in our survey, including their apparent overall satisfaction with trips to Tortuguero despite any shortcomings or disappointments noted, suggest that while trash on the landscape places the ecotourism aesthetic at risk, the word-of-
mouth implications of this disturbance are less clear. In future research, it might be useful to specifically ask tourists how perceived environmental problems or aesthetic disturbances are likely to affect their post-trip recommendations.

**Key management implications**

*Meeting expectations and fitting with the gaze is key; manage places and images accordingly*

Our study of tourist perceptions of the environment in Tortuguero suggests certain management implications regarding local attractions and the ecotourist gaze. For most respondents, the park represented a place to visit and see the things that they came to see (e.g. wildlife), rather than a set of people (staff) under an administration, with specific responsibilities in Tortuguero. This is not the end of the story vis-à-vis the park, however. Despite the fact that the park is often quite crowded with tour boats during high seasons, crowding did not feature prominently with respect to the park. In contrast to the beach and the village (with the exception of organized tours that occur in the village and the beach, e.g. turtle tours on the beach), the park is a place in which the tourists’ gazes are most directed or manipulated. Tourists are only taken through specific parts of the park, for instance, and are restricted to experiencing a minute amount of its total area, in boat rides through canals, walks on the short trails, or walks or tours on its beach. The common type of encounter most tourists have in the park is a
'jungle tour’ in which they are led by a guide who decides where they will go and tells them where to look. In between instructions, they are also busy looking at certain parts of the park (e.g. looking up into the trees rather than down into the water), trying to spot wildlife. Furthermore, in survey responses, comments about expectations were virtually absent from answers about the park, whereas contrasts between expectations and the reality of the beach, the village and tourism were present in other answers. The results suggest, therefore, that respondent experiences of the park largely met their expectation. They saw what they thought they would see and what they wanted to see: animals and jungle-like vegetation.

In the beach and the village, on the other hand, tourists are often free to wander and look around (less directed gaze) and often saw things that they did not expect to see, that didn’t fit with their (aesthetic) expectations for Tortuguero (e.g. trash). Park management shortcomings and illegal park uses such as felling timber, constructing an illegal road, and poaching, would not have been visible to most tourists (i.e. they were not exposed to problems associated with the park), who only interact with the park in limited, sanctioned ways in specific spaces. Problematic aesthetic elements and undesirable uses of the beach and the village such as clandestine waste dumping, however, would have been more readily visible to tourists. The management implication suggested by the contrast between park-related answers and the others is
that aesthetics must be managed to fit with expectations; respondents overwhelmingly liked and reported positively about the park because they saw what they expected to see. They are also more likely to have known about it in advance (it was noted as a main interest; it is mentioned in most promotional materials about Tortuguero), creating a more defined set of expectations. In order to better satisfy the ecotourist gaze at the village and on the beach, tourist expectations for the beach and the village must either be expanded to include deviations from its current expected ecotourism aesthetic (e.g. include the image of Tortuguero as a working village), or they must be managed in order to fit more closely with tourist expectations for them (e.g. appear cleaner and better maintained; apply greater structure and gaze directing to tourist interactions with the village and the beach). Neither of these would be an easy undertaking but something should be done in order to quell concerns raised about authenticity because such concerns have the potential to generate negative word-of-mouth. Options for doing this will be discussed in detail in following sections.

**Make the trash meet expectations or make expectations meet the trash**

As explained in other sections, trash on the landscape is a violation of ecotourism expectations (aesthetic and environmental). It does not fit with the image of Tortuguero (which respondents link to the park, nature, and wildlife, in their responses). The
absence of respondents making connections between the observed trash on the landscape, the local tourism industry, and themselves, in their responses suggest that: 1) tourist awareness about the connections between the solid waste crisis and tourism is minimal, and that 2) ‘technological guilt’ (Urry 1995) associated with solid waste in Tortuguero is low. And yet, some respondents did choose to write about the guilt that they feel about looking at people and walking close to homes while in the village. Few questions or comments were raised about the production or the origins of the trash. For example, most beach-related responses focused on the appearance of the trash (aesthetics). While some respondents did offer suggested solutions with respect to how it should be dealt with (e.g. beach clean-ups), the treatment of trash was rather superficial and respondents did not address the production of trash. As previously mentioned, this is interesting given ecotourists are often portrayed as being more educated, aware, and/or concerned about environmental impacts, including their own roles in such issues (Hvenegaard and Dearden 1998; Wight 1996b). This is also interesting because it suggests two main management scenarios regarding reconciling the solid waste crisis and the tourist gaze: 1) making the trash meet expectations (i.e. finding a way to improve waste management and/or conceal waste management shortcomings from tourists), or 2) making expectations meet trash (i.e. creatively incorporating the solid waste crisis into Tortuguero’s image).
Option 1 (manage the trash to meet expectations) is the more obvious approach in theory but a difficult one to implement in practice. For one, the recycling plant is in center of town, which suggests that the mismatch between waste on the landscape and the aesthetics of ecotourism (and waste management) were not really considered in the siting of the plant. This location makes trying to ‘push waste backstage’ less feasible, since there is little space backstage and an existing facility in the ‘frontstage’. Whereas the lodges can tuck their wastes away behind buildings, there are few places that the community can ‘hide’ its wastes, and community frustration with the whole situation sometimes encourages people to protest by drawing attention to the waste in the frontstage (e.g. burying in an open pit; burning in visible places). In addition to these problems of waste geography, Camacho’s report (2003) details local deficits in capital, expertise, and infrastructure that make it difficult for the community to effectively manage its trash. Therefore, while option 2 (expanding the gaze to include local environmental management challenges as part of tourism) might be less conventional, it might be more realistic in some respects. Educating prospective and visiting tourists about Tortuguero’s struggles with waste management might be cheaper and more easily implemented in Tortuguero in that it could require far less infrastructure. A combination of interpretive signs, related village tour components and promotional material components, and a creative re-framing of the local solid waste crisis as an
ongoing effort to manage Tortuguero’s trash more effectively could simultaneously: 1) make these struggles part of the expected experience of Tortuguero; 2) provide opportunities for tourists to donate time, money and knowledge to the cause; and 3) help to create a more realistic image for ecotourism in Tortuguero and beyond. This could work because of ecotourists’ interests in the environment and aesthetics—both of which are affected by inadequate waste management, and because of examples set by other programs (e.g. through types of volunteer ecotourism) of tourists contributing to local environmental management. On the tourist side, potential barriers to direct tourist involvement in such a project include the preeminence of aesthetics over environmental concerns in the survey data presented here, the short amount of time tourists spend in Tortuguero (2-3 days), their busy schedules, and a potential lack of willingness to be confronted with waste-related education or other expectations. In terms of local involvement in this re-orienting of the gaze to include local solid waste management challenges, locally-living people may not want this to be a part of the tourism image that they project for the village. For example, when Meletis was conducting her fieldwork, several people asked her not to say anything bad about Tortuguero and to not dwell on the waste crisis. These requests appeared to be grounded in pride but also in awareness that a trash crisis was not acceptable as part of an ecotourism destination’s reputation. We maintain, however, that contemplating possible ways to expand the gaze to
incorporate local environmental challenges is an important undertaking and that such
efforts are worthwhile given that there are many places (especially in remote areas of the
Global South) that are dependent on ecotourism and are aware of its aesthetic
requirements, and yet struggle to maintain an acceptable image. Creating a more
realistic image and set of expectations regarding ecotourism development in such areas
is an important part of moving the ecotourism project forward (Campbell, Gray, and
Meletis 2007); redirecting the image and the gaze help to reduce local financial costs (e.g.
relocating facilities; taking pains to transport and hide trash out of tourist sight) and
might also provide opportunities to help tourists make much needed connections
between themselves, the tourism industry, and local aesthetic and environmental
impacts.

Conclusions: where do we go from here?

Both academic authors (e.g. Place 1991) and technical reports (e.g. Troëng and
Drews 2004) leave tourists out as central actors in the ‘story’ of ecotourism in
Tortuguero. We hope that this paper provides useful illustrations about what can be
learned from tourists about a destination and its shortcomings, as well as making
creative management suggestions about managing with the tourist gaze in mind. Our
aim in writing is to contribute to the literature on ‘the story’ of ecotourism development
in Tortuguero, but also to larger theoretical and applied discussions about trying to reconcile ecotourism in theory with ecotourism in practice.

**Ecotourism images can be unrealistic; unfair**

The mismatches between Tortuguero’s reality (e.g. its struggle with a solid waste crisis), theorized tourist expectations for ecotourism-based communities, the infrequent images of people included in ecotourism marketing literature, and common themes in our respondents’ village-related responses help to expose the unrealistic expectations imposed on such villages by the ecotourism aesthetic. The aesthetic seems to demand a ‘sanitized’ village in which there are no obvious shortcomings or problems visible on the landscape (Saarinen 2004; Carrier and Macleod 2005). This is an especially unfair model for the many isolated rural ecotourism communities of The Global South that are distanced from government and other networks of support geographically and otherwise, among the other challenges experienced in such communities. Such gaps between ecotourism expectation, images, and realities expose contradictions regarding authenticity as a desired component of the ecotourist experience: while ecotourists might theoretically want to seek out authentic experiences, many ‘real life’ tourists might not actually want to see some of the authentic struggles and shortcomings being faced in communities such as Tortuguero, because they would disrupt the gaze and
cause tourists to contemplate their own roles in such struggles (or the absence of their contributions to positive change or solutions). In Tortuguero, as in many small island destinations, creating a ‘backstage’ in which to hide necessary services such as waste collection and disposal is not just unrealistic, it is physically restricted by the lack of useable/accessible local territory. The ultimate irony is that in many such cases, the same characteristics that draw ecotourists and ecotourism development into an area (e.g. isolation, limited infrastructure, rural character) are the same ones that create local environmental management and planning challenges, and therefore risk compromising the ecotourism aesthetic, leading to potential decreases in tourist satisfaction and visitation. Although our suggestions regarding re-shaping the gaze and incorporating environmental management challenges into the ecotourism experience in Tortuguero might seem unconventional and somewhat difficult to achieve, they could prove to be more realistic and more operationally feasible for Tortuguero and other places like it that face such challenges while dealing with their own marginality (see Chapter 4, this thesis) and operating with limited impact management resources at their disposal.

‘Nature’ in tourism is a social construction and the authenticity of ecotourism sites is emphasized through ‘cultural representations of reality’, including destination marketing and on-site environmental education efforts and other professional directing of the ecotourist gaze (MacCannell 1999; Saarinen 2004). As West and Carrier (2004)
emphasize, ecotourism is not about preserving natural landscapes but rather about creating landscapes through a market-oriented nature politics (West and Carrier 2004, 485). Expected landscapes of Tortuguero (for tourists) can be reshaped and remarke
ted, as many destination images are. From an applied perspective, therefore, there is the potential for expanding what tourists ‘expect to see’ (expanding the realm of acceptable in the ecotourist gaze) to include ecotourism management itself, with all of its strengths, weaknesses, success, and remaining challenges, such as unresolved waste management issues. If tourists expected to learn about and see the inner workings of trying to keep ecotourism ‘eco’ before arriving, waste crises and other such unresolved issues (as evidence of ecotourism impact management as a continuous work-in-progress) might be more tolerable to their gaze and therefore less likely to generate negative word-of-mouth or a decline in visitation. This re-marketing and exposing tourists to such management challenges might further present opportunities to 1) educate tourists about their own roles in the problems that they are gazing upon (e.g. why are there so many plastic water bottles in Tortuguero, and 2) solicit assistance from the tourists themselves about how to proceed in facing these challenges, with an eye to improving management and the tourist experience (e.g. tourists might be able to provide funding; volunteer labor; visiting expertise or political clout to aid in resolving such issues). Finally, from a theoretical perspective, this might be a way to officially move towards ‘post alternative
tourism’ (new tourism; post modern tourism) or a ‘reality ecotourism’ in which the backstage including all of its management challenges could be brought to the ‘frontstage’, and management could court and shape the ecotourist gaze rather than hide from it.
Chapter 3: Appreciation, apprehension, and action? An interpretation of resistance to ecotourism in Tortuguero, Costa Rica
**Introduction**

Tortuguero, Costa Rica, home to Tortuguero National Park (TNP), is a renowned sea turtle conservation and ecotourism site that can be considered a pioneer location for both. Sea turtle research and conservation has been on-going since the 1950s, and on-site ecotourism can be traced to the mid 1980s. There is an ‘official story’ of ecotourism in Tortuguero, one that highlights ecotourism’s contributions to both conservation and development, and that is told by the Caribbean Conservation Corporation (CCC), a locally operating environmental non-government organization (ENGO), the government of Costa Rica, and ecotourism businesses, among others. We begin this paper by reviewing existing work on resistance related to parks and protected areas, and to tourism. We then go on to describe our case study (Tortuguero, Costa Rica). We describe four elements of the ‘official story’ of ecotourism in Tortuguero and then interrogate the extent to which locally-living people \(^1\) reinforce or transgress from the official story, both in words and in deeds. We suggest that such transgressions reflect an ‘alternative story’ of ecotourism, and can be interpreted as resistance to components of

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\(^1\) For the purposes of this paper, we chose the term ‘locally-living people’ rather than simply using ‘residents’ or ‘local people’ because it best describes the people that live in Tortuguero. The population includes non-legal residents, short and longer term foreigners who live in the village, and people who divide their time between different countries or towns. All such categories better fit under ‘locally-living’ people than any other such term (i.e. whether they live there seasonally, full time, half time, and long/short term does not matter).
the ecotourism industry. In doing so, we draw on Scott’s (1985) theory of everyday resistance and his identification of ‘public’ and ‘hidden’ transcripts. While some discussion of the shortcomings of using resistance as a theoretical lens are included, applying resistance to interpret these results offers a new way of looking at ecotourism in Tortuguero. It focuses on and highlights the often unheard voices of locally-living people, and helps us move beyond basic portrayals of ‘communities’ as homogeneous entities (e.g. either happy or hostile hosts) that remain popular in some of the conventional tourism literature.

We use this case study2 to illustrate the relevance of concepts such as ‘everyday resistance’ (Scott 1985) for challenging oversimplified conceptualizations of the complex relationships operating in ecotourism-based communities: both intra-community relationships and relationships between community members and other interested actors and organizations. The ‘alternative story’ of ecotourism is both complex and somewhat ambiguous, but it is only in exploring alternatives to the ‘official story’, rather than continuing to focus on larger scale ‘dollars and cents’ evaluations of ecotourism, that we will begin to understand the lived experience of ecotourism in Tortuguero. With

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2 The methods for this study are described in other parts of this thesis (e.g. Introduction; Chapter 4). Meletis undertook participant observation in Tortuguero for approximately 7 months, and also conducted over 70 interviews with locally-living people (see Appendix 2 for local interview guide). The quotes and narratives presented here are from this data. The ‘alternative story’ is woven together from shared themes that arose during qualitative analysis using adapted grounded theory.
this increased understanding, we can better incorporate local concerns (deemed necessary for long-term ecotourism success, e.g. (Weaver 1998)) into ecotourism design, planning, and management.

**Background**

**Resistance in the tourism, and ‘parks and people’ literature**

Locally-living people are typically aware that ecotourism development often prioritizes Western environmental values over local ones, and conservation or environment-related needs over local subsistence and development (Honey 1999; Akama 1996). Having to live with ecotourism’s impacts, both desirable and undesirable, they are also aware of the ways in which ecotourism development tends to reward some people (e.g. elites) more than others, causing discrepancies between different groups in terms of their access to the industry and the benefits they can extract from it (West and Carrier 2002; Barrera 2003; Hall 1994)³. Furthermore, locally-living people realize through their intimate connections to ecotourism development that in some cases, the bulk of the costs, such as the loss of access to the amenities (e.g. parks) are borne by rural people (Weaver 1998; Akama 1996; Novellino 2003). Ecotourism, often linked to parks and protected areas has been linked to the expropriation of land from local people

³ Sherpas, for example, are reviled by members of other ethnic groups in Nepal because of their ability to profit more directly from tourism (Bhattarai, Conway, and Shrestha 2005).
and/or the restriction of local access to traditional resources, in many cases (Brockington 2004; Alexander and McGregor 2000; Charnley 2005; Homewood 1991; Campbell 1998; Evans 1999; Honey 1999). Both conservation and ecotourism often change local peoples’ access to land and resources, and imbue them with new meanings and/or sell the environment to tourists (Sundberg 2004). Lastly, people living in tourism communities are often aware of their own romanticized image within the tourism industry (Nygren 2003; Bhattacharyya 1997; Mowforth and Munt 1998).

In the tourism literature, many academics and tourism practitioners maintain that ensuring ‘happy hosts’ or a satisfied host community is key for long term tourism success (Kuvan and Akan 2005; Mowforth and Munt 1998). Host response models such as Doxey’s Irridex (1975) combined with case study data on local responses to tourism development suggest that if community members perceive tourism development as not meeting their interests and/or they do not agree with the way the local tourism industry is being run, that local resistance to tourism is a possibility if not an eventuality (Scheyvens 2002; Akama 1996).

Although instances of resistance have been recorded in some case studies, resistance to tourism development (or components of it) is not typically addressed as a
topic in its own right within much of the tourism-based literature\(^4\). Instances of resistance are typically subsumed into larger discussions of host perceptions or conflicts of interest in tourism destinations. Furthermore, attention to resistance within the tourism literature tends to focus on very overt acts of resistance such as outright protest, arson, and vandalism. Weaver draws attention to the 'light a fire' movement in the Philippines in his article on ecotourism development in the Third World, for instance. He describes how local people began a movement to burn down luxury hotels, employing arson as a tool of resistance against what they viewed as an undesirable type of tourism development (Richter 1992, cited in Weaver 1998: 59). Hall writes about a somewhat similar case: a group of Solomon islanders, objecting to a change in ownership of a local resort, organized a letter-writing campaign to express local opposition to the lack of consultation of local people, and also “dug holes in the airstrip, sent painted warriors to force guests off the island, and closed down the resort in spite of a court ruling against them” (Minerbi 1992: 19, cited in Hall 1994: 139). Cruise industry scholars have written about strike action taken by cruise line employees, the difficult working conditions they face, their relative powerlessness in the hierarchy of

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\(^4\) The literature on ‘parks and people’ is an exception. In many cases, it offers a more in-depth look at resistance, typically with respect to local responses to the creation of parks and protected areas. Such scenarios are increasingly tied to tourism development. Examples of such coverage of resistance include: (Brockington 2004; Akama 1996; Homewood 1991; Sullivan 2003; Alexander and McGregor 2000; Honey 1999).
cruise line employment, and the tough sanctions that have been taking against dissenting and resisting workers in the past (Weaver 2005; Klein 2002; Mather 2002).

While attention is often focused on overt forms, more covert forms of resistance are also evident. For example, some authors have interpreted tourism work as a type of social performance or ‘dance’, and have revealed how tourism service employees use such performances to voice their resistance (Tracy 2000, cited in Weaver 2005), others have provided examples of folklore-based resistance such as Rohan Seon’s song Alien voicing local anger over resorts in St. Lucia buying up beaches and forbidding local access (reprinted in Scheyvens 2002: 27).

In many cases, community members use both subtle and overt forms of resistance to express opposition to tourism development or components of it. Alexander and McGregor’s in-depth article captures the various types of resistance that the CAMPFIRE program faced in the Gwampa Valley5. Local residents had suffered through failed projects, false promises, violent relocations, and more, and their resistance reflected their anger, resentment and ‘fear of development’ (Alexander and McGregor 2000). Resisters repeatedly refused to endorse the proposed project, despite its potential economic benefits; they used a myriad of resistance tactics including overt and everyday resistance: they repeatedly rejected proposals at meetings; they collaborated with the

5 CAMPFIRE is a reserve-based game hunting and safari tourism program in Zimbabwe.
media to produced negative articles about it; they consulted lawyers about legal action; they proposed alternatives; they made statements about their resistance and put forth speakers; they voted against the project in local elections; the wore placards and sang songs against the project (Alexander and McGregor 2000). Local CAMPFIRE resisters viewed their resistance as ‘progressive’ as they were trying to protect their ‘modern’ farming lifestyle and were resisting the more ‘primitive’ lifestyle that was being proposed for them (Alexander and McGregor 2000).

Despite the examples presented in this section related to parks and tourism, resistance remains a somewhat peripheral topic in tourism studies. For example, a search of The Annals of Tourism Research (the preeminent tourism research journal, est.1973) archives using ‘resistance’ as a search term (07/13/06) yielded only four articles. Case study evidence suggests that greater efforts should be made to recognize resistance to tourism development or elements of it, and to contextualize and understand local resistance as has been done by scholars (e.g. political ecologists) with respect to resistance related to other types of development in the developing world such as forestry (e.g. Peluso 1992; Kull 2002), industrial development (e.g. Forsyth 2004), or agricultural and land reform (e.g. Wolford 2005, 2004). This discussion should be more complex and include the possible implications of resistance to tourism development over time, and considerations of what resistance suggests about the changing
relationships between ‘host community’, destination, tourists, and other related actors. The next section will illustrate how incorporating resistance-related theory and concepts can help to shed new light on the lived experiences of ecotourism-based communities.

**Site description: Tortuguero, Costa Rica**

Tortuguero National Park (TNP) is on the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica, just south of the Nicaraguan border. TNP includes 26,156ha of land and marine hectares (Caribbean Conservation Corporation 2007; Ministerio del Ambiente y Energia (MINAE) no date; Evans 1999), but typically has only 5 staff members present daily (Evans 1999). TNP is one of the earliest established (est. 1975) and most visited parks in the country. The number of tourists visiting TNP has grown rapidly, from approximately 200 tourists in 1980 (Place 1991) to over 80,000 tourists a year (2004) (Peskin 2002; Place 1991; Harrison, Troëng, and assistants 2004; de Haro, Troeng, and assistants 2005). The park system is within the jurisdiction of the Costa Rican National Ministry of the Environment and Energy (MINAE), and tourists visiting the park pay a 7USD entrance fee to do so. The fees collected at Tortuguero get coalesced into a regional park fund, and are redistributed on a park by park basis, in terms of MINAE-determined need.

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*The number of tourists that visit TNP each year can be considered conservative estimates for the annual number of tourists to the village, since it is possible to visit Tortuguero (and see nesting sea turtles) without entering the park.*
Economic history and ecotourism

Tortuguero village is located just north of TNP, on a finger of land between the Caribbean (Atlantic) Ocean and a canal and lagoon system (Laguna Tortuguero). Historically, the local economy in Tortuguero included the consumptive use of sea turtles (taking of turtle meat and eggs), and residents also participated in a regional, commercial sea turtle harvest that served markets in the USA and Europe (Parsons 1962). These markets closed in the early 1970s, and before adopting ecotourism as its economic mainstay, residents engaged in small-scale subsistence agriculture and worked on near-by fruit plantations. The village economy also experienced a series of boom and bust cycles based on resource extraction for export of raw materials (Lefever 1992; Place 1991). Tourism increased dramatically beginning in the mid 1980s and early 1990s (Campbell 2002a), in line with national trends (Campbell 2002b), and the village now lives from ecotourism, with almost all household benefiting either directly or indirectly, and with few other employment options. Introduction of the park and the gradual expansion of natural resource-related legislation and rules have changed local access to the land and resources. This includes the criminalization of the extractive use of natural resources. For example, no one except paying tourists or permit-carrying local guides is allowed on the beach after 6pm for most of the year, as the result of turtle-related regulations. Furthermore, the taking of turtle meat or eggs is illegal and
punishable by jail time (Costa Rican law 8325 (updated in 2002) is the most recent, more stringent anti-poaching turtle law) (Campbell 2007).

The CCC, turtles and tourism

The US-based (Gainesville, FL) Caribbean Conservation Corporation (CCC) is a turtle-conservation NGO that has operated in the village since the 1950s; it has a San Jose office and a field-station and museum in Tortuguero (The Caribbean Conservation Corporation 1996-2007). It runs volunteer conservation research programs for longer-term volunteer interns and shorter term volunteer ecotourists; it monitors and tags nesting sea turtles, conducts egg counts, and undertakes satellite tracking of some turtles (Campbell and Smith 2005; Campbell and Smith 2006). While some CCC employees have expressed reservations about tourism development in the past (Campbell 2002a), more recently, the organization has become an important pro-tourism actor in ‘the official story of ecotourism in Tortuguero’. For example, the scientific director (until 2006) often repeats the phrase ‘a turtle is worth more alive than dead’ (Troëng 2004; Troëng and Drews 2004), one of the four elements of the ‘official story’ of ecotourism in Tortuguero that has become somewhat of a mantra; it is repeated among

7 It began as Archie Carr’s ‘Brotherhood of The Green Turtle’ in the 1950s.
conservationists, tourists and locally-living people. He has proposed Tortuguero as a model for sea turtle conservation (see Campbell 2007) and many individuals and organizations in the international turtle conservation community now repeat the mantra. Tourism is frequently forwarded as a way of converting local communities to the cause of sea turtle conservation; the rationale is that by providing new turtle-related tourism income, ecotourism can replace the extractive use of turtles (Campbell 2007; Campbell 2002b, 2002c).

**Tourist attractions and accommodations**

Tourist attractions in Tortuguero include the park (forest and canals), nesting sea turtles (March-November), other wildlife, and surrounding vegetation. There is no cultural tourism per se, and past surveys of tourists have revealed little interest in local culture (Jacobson and Robles 1992; see also Chapter 2, this thesis). Turtles are arguably the main attraction (Lee and Snepenger 1992; Chapter 2, this thesis; Jacobson and Robles 1992), and three species of endangered sea turtles (green turtles, leatherbacks, and hawksbills) nest on the beach at Tortuguero (CCC 2006). Tourists pay a park fee (if touring on the park part of the beach) and pay for a mandatory guided tour to observe a

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A quick Google search for the phrase ‘a turtle is worth more alive than dead’ provides thousands of pages of hits and the first page includes links to WWF (Worldwide; Philippines; Switzerland; UK), an online news service called Environmental New Service, and a website called earthdive.com. All of these reference the *Money Talks* report co-authored by the former scientific director of the CCC (Troëng and Drews 2004).
nesting turtle. Guides are certified by MINAE and permitted by the Park, and come from within and outside of Tortuguero. In 1998, of approximately 150 guides, 45 were locally-living and these local guides obtained 72% of permits (Peskin 2002). In 2007, 68 of 128 of permitted turtle guides are local (Harrison 2007).

Tourists can take advantage of two main accommodation types: *cabinas* that provide motel-style accommodations (some of which are locally owned), with costs ranging from 8-15$ per person per night, and luxury (eco)lodges (all of which are owned by ‘outsiders’: foreigners or people from other regions of Costa Rica), located adjacent to or outside of the village, with costs ranging from 150-300$ per person per night. In 2004, there were 17 *cabinas* that house a total of 462 beds, and 12 lodges that house approximately 903 beds (Harrison, Troëng, and assistants 2005).

**The community: age and composition**

As ecotourism has grown, so has the village, from 29 households and approximately 200 residents in the early 1990s (Lefever 1992; Place 1991), to over 100 households and more than 800 residents in 2003 (Camacho 2003; Barrera 2003). The community’s composition has also undergone substantial changes. The people that settled Tortuguero in the 1930s were black Caribbean people mainly from Bluefields and Corn Island, Nicaragua, and San Andres, Colombia. They spoke English and a ‘creolized form of English’ originally from Jamaica, and brought black Caribbean culture
with them when they settled in Tortuguero (Lefever 1992). More recently, the population at Tortuguero has diversified in terms of nationalities and ethnic and linguistic backgrounds⁹, while at the same time becoming more linguistically homogeneous; Spanish has replaced Creole as the most spoken language, with English not far behind. Two important elements of diversification are North American and European expatriates who live in the village and/or have invested in tourism businesses and Nicaraguan laborers (and more recently people from other countries such as Colombia) who come in search of jobs and a better quality of life. Outside of the village, a squatter settlement referred to locally as San Francisco or El Cerro also exists, and has become larger and more permanent in recent years (e.g. it now includes a school), despite the historical precedence of the park forcibly evicting such settlements.

These transitions in the Tortuguero community have not all been smooth. Intra-village and inter-village conflicts exist and the village includes strong political camps and an interesting and varied discourse regarding who should be considered insiders/outiders. Also, despite its growing population and growing infrastructure needs and demands, Tortuguero has no elected municipal authority on-site (e.g. no mayor); it relies on organizations such as the local women’s association, the

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⁹ Until recently, most foreign immigrants came from Nicaragua. In recent years though, people have begun to come from Colombia and other nearby countries as well.
development association, the guiding association, and village-elected leaders within each of these. The village is part of the shared regional municipality of Pococi which includes seven villages, and whose head office is in Guapiles, a city several hours outside of Tortuguero.

**Ecotourism as an economic, social and cultural transition**

Ecotourism is more than an economic system; it is a value system that includes its own associated ethic and aesthetic, primarily based on foreign values (Akama 1996; West and Carrier 2002; Smith and Duffy 2003). In Tortuguero, these values were introduced by the national park system (one modeled on the US system, see Campbell 2002b; Evans 1999), the CCC, and foreign lodge owners. These foreign values continue to be perpetuated through (mostly foreign) ecotourist demands and the corresponding requirements of the industry, and maintenance of an environmental aesthetic is critical to ecotourism’s continued success. The growth of ecotourism in Tortuguero has also corresponded with increased restrictions on resource use for local people (including use of sea turtles). The shift to a service economy also represents a new way of life for local people. There is greater integration into regional, national, and even global markets, and increased opportunities for inter-cultural interaction/exchange. However there is also additional pressure on workers to adapt to this industry, for example by improving their English skills and, for guides, their knowledge of turtle biology. Thus, the switch to
ecotourism has been accompanied by a number of cultural, social, and environmental changes, most of which remain unexplored in the literature.

The research that has been conducted on tourism in Tortuguero highlights its economic importance to, and support for it among, community members (Place 1991; Lee and Snepenger 1992), and more specifically among guides (Peskin 2002; Jacobson and Robles 1992). While economic benefits clearly exist, research has also shown that these are not equally distributed. For example, while Peskin found guides to be highly supportive of ecotourism, she also found the distribution of income from guiding is highly skewed, with guiding being one of the most lucrative forms of local ecotourism employment (that does not involve ownership of a commercial enterprise) and some guides earning much more than others (Peskin 2002). Research also suggests that while ecotourism may generate significant revenue, there are high levels of profit leakage. Lee and Snepenger (1992) calculated that 75% of tourists visit Tortuguero on package tours to the larger lodges and spend approximately 10% of their trip expenses in the village, and Campbell calculated low levels of local accommodation ownership (Campbell 2002a). Barrera’s study (2003) on ‘social difference’ and the local ecotourism industry suggests that access to opportunities beyond simple employment is limited for locally-living people. Locally-living people who own *cabinas*, restaurants, or shops (some of whom are North American or European expatriates) are exceptions. Barrera highlighted
the disadvantages that local residents often face in terms of gaining better positions, starting their own businesses, or improving the amount of business or tips that they get. She cited the lack of support resources such as access to: affordable English lessons, local savings accounts, and credit (Barrera 2003). It is not surprising, therefore, that most locally-living people in Tortuguero occupy lower-end positions in the ecotourism labor hierarchy; they supply labor for ecotourism-related positions in tourist transportation, food preparation, grounds keeping and maintenance, housekeeping, reception, and security. Place (1991) critiqued the inadequate overall planning for tourism (e.g. no general tourism plan exists for the village) and the environment, the lack of local participation in planning processes and a corresponding lack of empowerment within the community. Despite such shortcomings, local people are generally in support of the ecotourism economy and prefer it to what came before (e.g. lumber work; plantation work) (Place 1991; Barrera 2003; Peskin 2002; Campbell 2002b). As such, investigations of existing negative perceptions, concerns, fears or changes suggested by locally-living people have been limited.

In fact, there has been little written about the local experience of living with ecotourism, or that has tried to incorporate local voices or ethnographic data. Such work is needed given that: 1) the only ethnographic work done in the village by Lefevre (1992) was conducted before ecotourism became a dominant economic, social, and cultural
force; and 2) Tortuguero represents an important ecotourism ‘case study’ since it is upheld as a successful ecotourism village in which turtles, tourists, and the local people benefit from the economic switch to ecotourism (Troëng 2004; Troëng and Drews 2004). This paper presents locally-living voices as part of an ‘alternative story’ of ecotourism in Tortuguero, one that sometimes reinforces, but often challenges, the ‘official story’. As the title of this paper suggests, elements of resistance, rejection, questioning, and accusation do exist despite local support for and appreciation of ecotourism development; these have not as of yet received any serious attention in the literature. This paper focuses on the ‘everyday life’ of ecotourism in Tortuguero and local discourse and actions as a complement to the research that has preceded it.

Results

Distilling the official story of ecotourism in Tortuguero

The Costa Rican government (e.g. Instituto Costaricense de Turismo (ICT): the national tourism institute, el Ministerio del Ambiente y Energía (MINAE): the national environment and energy ministry, and Tortuguero National Park), The Caribbean Conservation Corporation (CCC), and actors within the ecotourism industry (e.g. lodges and tour operators), are the key contributors to ‘the official story of ecotourism in Tortuguero’. For example, the national government of Costa Rica promotes ecotourism
in Tortuguero (e.g. www.visitcostarica.gov) and is also responsible for the planning and management of both the park and tourism in Tortuguero. Until very recently, Tortuguero National Park was featured on the government’s website as the premiere ecotourism destination (Instituto Costarricense de Turismo 2006). The CCC has perhaps the largest impact on the official story through its research and education publications, both in academic and non-academic venues (Caribbean Conservation Corporation 1989, 2003, 2006; Troëng 2004; Troëng and Drews 2004). Ecotourism businesses adopt the ‘official story’ in their promotional materials and on their websites: Costa Rica Expeditions, Tortuga Lodge’s parent company, proclaims that “Tortuguero is conservation” and chronicles the CCC’s turtle conservation work in its lodge description (Costa Rica Expeditions no date); Nature Air, one of the two national airlines, exaggerates CCC claims by suggesting that “Tortuguero beaches are the most important nesting grounds to thousands of Green Sea Turtles” (Nature Air 2001-2007).

The ‘official story’ has been extracted by reading and analyzing documents, websites, and other resources produced by these actors, and by additional actors who often consult the key actors when producing information about Tortuguero (e.g. a company that produced a film with cooperation of the CCC, Smith 2005). Our analysis reveals four separate but interrelated themes that capture the ‘official story’:
i. Tortuguero is an eco success: it has succeeded in conserving the local environment and especially nesting turtles and their habitat.

ii. Tortuguero is a tourism development success: it has generated considerable income and other benefits for the local community.

iii. Tortuguero residents appreciate the economic value of sea turtles and recognize that ‘a turtle is worth more alive than dead’.

iv. Tortuguero is a (unified, homogeneous) community that is actively participating in ecotourism.

Uncovering an alternative story of ecotourism in Tortuguero

The alternative story of ecotourism in Tortuguero draws on past research, but relies primarily on interviews and observations made by the lead author during a total of seven months of fieldwork in Tortuguero in 2003 and 2004. This project is a qualitative undertaking grounded in human geography as an interpretive social science; it combines work on empirical data with a theoretical interpretation. The focus on presenting previously underrepresented voices (in the story of ecotourism development in Tortuguero) in order to provide ‘thicker’ descriptions of experienced contradictions and complexities was best served through the extensive use of quotes related as reflections of key themes. The iterative analysis process\(^{10}\) that informed this paper is revealed by the fact that the idea for using resistance as a lens to interpret these data

\(^{10}\) Each interview was read through multiple times and coded using the same coding scheme and revisiting and updated as new codes emerged.
arose from the data once analysis had already begun; the authors did not envision researching resistance when they began the project. The interpretive nature of this project is made clear through the declared use of resistance as ‘lens’ to interpret the data; the authors realize that other interpretations are possible but posit this one based on the literature and its fit with the data (see Chapter 4 this thesis for an environmental justice interpretation of local discourse in Tortuguero).

Given the emphasis on local voices, interviews provide most of the data analyzed and presented here. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 70+ locally-living people and other related experts. Due to the diverse nature of the local population and the different roles people play within/outside the ecotourism industry, efforts were made to interview as many different types of respondents as possible (e.g. women and men; lower and higher level ecotourism employees; longer term and shorter term residents, etc.). Interviews were conducted using a set of questions as a topic check-list; these included open-ended questions about the beach, the park, and tourism in Tortuguero (see Appendix 2). Meletis conducted the interviews in Spanish or English; she did not tape record the interviews, but took careful notes during interviews (and wrote down key quotes verbatim).

11 Regarding 70+ interviews: 70 were conducted using the same interview guide and additional interviews were conducted on an ad hoc opportunistic basis. For example, sometimes Zoë sat in on an interview being conducted by another person, and contributed a few questions for her own research.
We analyzed the interview texts using adapted grounded theory (Charmaz 2005; Strauss and Cobin 1994; Baxter and Eyles 1999), with thematic codes emerging from the interview notes rather than from a pre-determined template. The qualitative data generated during interviews were analyzed in a number of ways, and this paper focuses on the common concerns and critiques that emerged. During the iterative process of repeatedly going through the data, it became clear that these common concerns and critiques (which were coded as themes and sub-themes using NVivo software) could be considered to constitute an ‘alternative story of ecotourism in Tortuguero’. In this paper they have been organized around the four components of ‘the official story’, each of which were key themes in analysis.

Despite the variety of respondent backgrounds included through purposeful sampling (e.g. occupations, demographic profiles, links to ecotourism), common themes arose in interview responses, sometimes in an almost unanimous fashion. This suggests that despite differences that exist within the community, shared viewpoints and concerns exist, with respect to ‘ecotourism in Tortuguero’. For the most part, quantification of responses has been limited since it was not the most appropriate means for meeting our research goals (e.g. presenting an alternative to the ‘official story of ecotourism in Tortuguero’).
The official story of ecotourism in Tortuguero

In the ‘official story of ecotourism in Tortuguero’ is portrayed, for the most part, as an ‘eco success.’ The ‘eco’ reputation is reinforced by Tortuguero’s lush appearance (e.g. thick vegetation, canals, the presence of wildlife, a village with relatively low density buildings), and by evidence of an increase in numbers of nesting green turtles (Bjorndal et al. 1999). Most recently, Troëng and Drews (2004: 40-41) put the figure at a 417% increase in nesting since 1971. This ‘eco success’ is typically tied to conservation efforts and especially to the existence of the national park (TNP) and the legislation that supports it. Increasingly, ‘eco’ success it also linked to the advent of ecotourism. The CCC, for example, claims that “The increasing [green turtle] nesting trend suggests that conservation efforts have been successful” and cites the ban on egg and turtle collection (1963), the prohibition on the export of calipee12 (1969) and the declaration of Tortuguero National Park (1970) as key components of this success (Troëng and Rankin 2005: 114). The CCC claims that the presence of scientists, tour guides and park staff decreases illegal turtle take (ibid). In addition, a recent WWF report (co-authored by the former scientific director for the CCC in Costa Rica) claims that sea-turtle conservation efforts and associated sea-turtle based tourism in Tortuguero have led to “improved productive

12 Calipee is “a vital ingredient in turtle soup. It is the cartilage cut from the bones of the bottom shell” (www.turtles.org).
assets and stocks such as soil, water, vegetation, fish and wild food stocks” (Troëng and Drews 2004: 17). The report also states that ‘environmental sustainability’ has been achieved in Tortuguero. While the authors do acknowledge problems like a lack of adequate solid waste management and sewage treatment as shortcomings, the focus is on ‘environmental achievements.’ Turtle-based tourism is credited with these achievements, and Tortuguero is presented as a ‘success story’ (Troëng and Drews 2004).

The official story also presents Tortuguero as an ecotourism success, with ecotourism contributing to both environmental conservation and local development. In spite of receiving in excess of 80,000 tourists a year (de Haro, Troeng, and assistants 2005), Tortuguero’s ecotourism label/image and reputation remains strong. Tortuguero is aggressively marketed as an ecotourism destination both by government agencies and private companies. Tortuguero is a premier destination inside the ecotourism portal of the national tourism institute’s (ITC or Instituto de Turismo Costaricense) official website (Instituto Costarricense de Turismo 2006), and local businesses reinforce the idea the tourism in Tortuguero is in tune with the environment:

Looking for a true unspoiled and virtually unvisited tropical rainforest, where you can explore the Eco-system at your own pace, while staying at a cozy jungle hideaway? Laguna del Legarto Lodge is such a place! (...) Laguna del Lagarto Lodge is operated in harmony with nature, under strict ecological guidelines (Anonymous undated-a).
Ecotourism’s development success stems from the financial benefits for ‘the community of Tortuguero’\textsuperscript{13}. For example, the WWF report \textit{Money Talks} suggests that tourism in Tortuguero has created 265 jobs and generates an estimated 6.7 million dollars, the latter based the estimated 255.38USD spent per visitor (Troëng and Drews 2004: 40-41). This report does not indicate whether the 255.38USD is per visitor day or per visit. As suggested by the numbers in this report, both the number of jobs and the amount of revenues generated by ecotourism in Tortuguero are likely to have increased since 2000, when the CCC used Tortuguero as an example of ‘best use’ of sea turtles:

Non-extractive “Best Use” includes using sea turtles as an eco-tourism attraction. An example is Tortuguero, where in 1999 a total of 20,885 visitors got permits to go on guided turtle walks (Troëng et al. 2000). The tourists spent on average US$57.6 per day for an average 4.1 days in Tortuguero (ICT 2000). The value of turtle related tourism is approximately US$4.9 million per year and local tour guides proudly state that a turtle is worth more to them live than dead (Troëng, Ranstam, and Rankin 2002).

\textsuperscript{13} As will be discussed in a later section, it is typical for the ‘community’ of Tortuguero to be treated as a homogeneous unit in ‘the official story of ecotourism in Tortuguero’, and for the benefits-related focus to be on tourism-associated economic benefits as represented by gross revenue generation figures. For example, the CCC website refers to its “sustainable development work with the Tortuguero community” and mentions that “Gradually, local shops and hotels have sprouted offering villagers a steady source of income” (Caribbean Conservation Corporation 2003).
Both of these examples use gross revenue figures and do not take distribution or leakage into account, but nonetheless give a sense of the economic importance of ecotourism in Tortuguero.

In the official story, it is through ecotourism’s economic value that local people have come to support conservation, as captured in the phrase ‘a turtle is worth more alive than dead.’ The phrase is invoked to summarize changing local attitudes towards and values for sea turtles and their conservation and was oft-repeated by the former scientific director (printed examples include: Troëng and Drews 2004; Troëng 1999b, 1999a). It is a powerful motif for turtle conservation in Tortuguero, and incorporated into the CCC’s on site museum and into CCC literature and web information:

…CCC’s sustainable development work with the Tortuguero community has demonstrated that live sea turtles on the beach have greater value for villagers than dead turtles in the stewpot. Tourists pay considerable fees to watch sea turtles nest on Tortuguero Beach. Some 50,000 tourists visit Tortuguero annually to see nesting turtles and visit the tropical rainforests of Tortuguero National Park (Caribbean Conservation Corporation 2003).

Development of ecotourism activities in Tortuguero, since the mid-1980s, has provided alternative livelihoods for many villagers and has lessened the impact of extractive use on the rookery (Troeng et al. 2002, cited in Troëng and Rankin 2005: 115).

The CCC also evidence the ‘conversion’ of local people from turtle consumption to turtle conservation, by including community members as authors on academic articles
(e.g. Troëng, Ranstam, and Rankin 2002), and thanking them for their efforts to monitor and protect turtles in written reports (e.g. (Troëng and Rankin 2005). Lending weight to this argument, locally-living people such as turtle guides, do indeed repeat the mantra and recognize the economic value of turtles for the village (Smith 2002).

As will be discussed later in the paper, some illegal harvesting of turtle eggs and adults continues in Tortuguero. In the ‘official story’ this is often attributed to ‘outsiders’ and/or to a few very desperate individuals within the village, such as known drug addicts. In ‘the official story’, demand for turtle meat and eggs mainly lies outside the village, typically in the city of Limon. The CCC also draws attention to the (legal) turtle fishing in Nicaragua as a cause for depopulation of green turtles, distinguishing Tortuguero from its northern neighbors (Troëng and Rankin 2005).

In many of the sources that contribute to the ‘official story of ecotourism in Tortuguero’, the ‘community of Tortuguero’ tends to be portrayed and/or referred to as unified entity. An exception to this, although dated, is the CCC’s brief nod to the “variety of cultures: Hispanic, Miskito Indian (Nicaragua), and Afro-Caribbean” in its description of Tortuguero’s inhabitants (Caribbean Conservation Corporation 2003). The problematic treatment of ‘community’ in the conservation literature has been well recognized (e.g. Agrawal and Gibson 1999; Honey 1999), and as will be seen in the
‘alternative story’ community diversity and intra-community conflicts are important themes among locally-living people.

In addition to having its diversity minimized in the ‘official story’, the community of Tortuguero is also portrayed as actively participating in its development as a conservation area and as a (still rising) ecotourism destination. Actors such as the park, the CCC, and the national tourism institute (the ICT) all make such claims, to varying degrees. For example, the CCC claims on its website that it is “working with villagers” and conducting “sustainable development work with the Tortuguero community” (Caribbean Conservation Corporation 2003). Tortuga Lodge, one of the oldest lodges in the village, makes similar claims regarding community involvement in its Internet-based promotional materials:

> With over 80% of Tortuga Lodge’s personnel from the Tortuguero area, we are committed to playing an active role in the Tortuguero community and working closely with an exceptionally effective community development association that has made Tortuguero an innovative model for cooperation between private enterprise and local communities, obtaining substantial benefits for the town (Anonymous undated-b).

**The alternative story of ecotourism in Tortuguero: as told by respondents**

**Respondents question Tortuguero’s ‘eco-success’**

Respondents tell a very different story about the environment in Tortuguero. For one, many respondents stated that they do not believe that the local environment is
being properly managed, and most listed specific environmental concerns. These included:

- poor waste management: e.g. the presence of litter on the landscape; illegal dumping and burning of wastes in the village;
- motor-boat related issues: e.g. noise generation; disturbance of animal habitat; erosion of canals; boat-caused water pollution;
- habitat loss or declines in local wildlife (species loss and declines in animal numbers);
- uncontrolled and unchecked construction in the village and at the lodges;
- water quality problems: e.g. from untreated sewage entering the lagoon; from increased boat traffic; from increased siltation of the canal system; from nearby banana plantation pollution, and
- erosion (e.g. of canal and river banks and of the local hill Cerro Tortuguero).

During Meletis’ field work, there was a waste management ‘crisis’ in Tortuguero (see Chapters 3 and 5, this thesis). The local recycling plant was not functioning (for technical and political reasons) and locally-living people were struggling to deal with garbage, often doing whatever they could to ‘get rid’ of solid waste; they would bury it, burn it, or otherwise ‘dispose of it’. Thus, the topic of solid waste dominated in many interviews with local residents. In the alternative story of eco success in Tortuguero, local people are critical of key ecotourism actors (e.g. the park, MINAE and various levels of government, tourism lodges, and sometimes even the CCC) who they see as failing in terms of environmental management. Respondents were particularly concerned about the lack of support that the village was receiving to address
environmental problems in general and solid waste in particular. For example, the municipality was singled out as failing to assist with waste management:

The municipality doesn’t offer support to get the garbage out to La Pavona (a local waterway). The whole system has to change, including the administration of the [recycling] plant. The municipality doesn’t charge anything here so they don’t care, but if they could charge, they would be interested (R53, 2004).

In all of Costa Rica, there are municipalities. Why isn’t there a municipality cleaning here? Here, they aren’t doing anything. In Limon and in San Jose, they clean the garbage but not here. Here, they only come to collect taxes. 60-70 years ago, the municipality, the ICE and others, what did they know about Tortuguero? Nothing. But now, (they just want to get money from Tortuguero), they don’t provide any services… The doctors come when they can, the place is dirty, no one wants to cooperate with them. The doctors come to help and the municipality should pay someone to clean (the clinic) for them. The people can’t do everything. The municipality must do something. The policemen are also not paid enough and not given enough food; they also don’t have houses. In Tortuguero, the government only comes to exploit- that’s all. Sometimes they make you pay your electric bill twice. Before, there was no electricity here and we didn’t die. They just come to exploit… and there are some thieves (ladrones) here, like in the rest of Costa Rica. Why doesn’t the government help? (R67, 2004).

Respondents also singled out the park as a particularly problematic actor, highlighting the problematic relationship between the park and the village. For example, many commented on the park as ‘not caring enough’ about the village and not doing enough to minimize the undesirable environmental impacts of tourism in the village:

No, it isn’t really managed- we go back to the same thing, the Park doesn’t really care about the environment in Tortuguero. It is a government agency and it
should care more. The village too- it doesn’t appear that way to me (it doesn’t appear managed. (R58, 2004).

Respondents recognized structural issues that limit the park’s ability to contribute to local environmental management, such as understaffing and underfunding, but did not view these as sufficient excuses for the park’s shortcomings:

“The park should stop saying ‘we don’t have personnel’, I am sick of hearing this. Sometimes when I take tourists on tours we see people damaging the rainforest. I don’t like explaining this to tourists…” (R58, 2004).

Many respondents also questioned the financial and managerial aptitudes of the national park administration, as well as the entire park financing system. They expressed suspicions and concerns about what happens to collected park fees and several respondents suggested that Tortuguero is not receiving a sufficient percentage of collected park fees to allow it to adequately finance impact management. They demanded that more of the park-collected money stay in the village so that it can be used for priority spending on items such as solid waste impact management. As these quotes suggest, there is a great awareness of the amounts of money coming into the park and a rather high level of suspicion and mistrust with respect to where this money goes and what the park uses it for:
It is difficult to put into words but the national park system, the money that comes into Tortuguero, goes out to San Jose. It (the park) receives 55,000 people a year in a town of 850 and that’s one and three quarters of a million US dollars a year- and that goes to San Jose, and not the parks. More of that money needs to come back to Tortuguero- a much larger percentage. I’m not sure what the percentage is but if 40-45% can come back... that money should go to the village because the village has the infrastructure that supports people coming to see the park (R60, 2004).

(regarding the park) It’s a big lie. They get a lot of money from the tourists and it doesn’t go to the community or the schools. I don’t know where it goes... The park generates money all year- high season, low season- there are always tourists. So my question is: where is the money? (...) I also know that there are Europeans who give (donate) money and I don’t know where the money goes. For example, there isn’t even a good path into the park. (...) The biggest benefit (money) goes to the park. Like I said, we don’t even know where it goes (R61, 2004).

Critiques of the park also included the suggestion that the park (at the national level, and in terms of local staff members efforts on-site) is overly focused on turtle conservation and that this may be adversely impacting the environment and other species within it:

They (the park staff) have done a very important job: the protection of turtles, but they are not protecting the beach. They are not getting the cooperation of the people. They are not looking after the trails. They are not helping the village, helping to clean the village. They should cooperate with the Development Association; they should help to keep this beautiful place clean. I have a lot of people who come and visit me and say that Tortuguero is beautiful but dirty (R58, 2004)\(^{14}\).

\(^{14}\) Complaints regarding the park-community divide will be addressed in the section “The Community is Participating”.

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Apart from that, for the turtle season, they watch the beach but they don’t watch the other parts, so they get destroyed. They only look after the part that’s important to them, the turtles and nothing else, so that means that there is illegal hunting during turtle season. But really, everything is important, (like) *tepisquintle* for example. (…). (R61, 2004).

Some respondents believe the park’s responsibilities extend beyond on-site, in park environmental impact management and/or financing such management. They see general community health and wellbeing as a park-related responsibility given that the community lives from tourism (which finances the park) and that the community must accommodate tourists who come to visit the park. Because of such perceived intimate connections between the community, the park, and tourism, some respondents believe community-park relations must improve and that the park must provide the village with general types of assistance and support. One respondent explains it this way:

I said the park should take better care of the village because the tourists come in and bring the park money and the money goes out. The park doesn’t do anything for the community. For example the path that leads to the park is bad. You would think that with all of that money, that they could do something about it. Do you know how much money comes into the park every year? It’s about half a million dollars (R54, 2004).

Respondents highlighted the lack of both local and extra-local cooperation on environmental issues. For instance, one respondent lamented the lack of cooperation
between the two actors he viewed as responsible for the poor local environmental management. MINAE and the ICT:

Here, there are two institutions that look after tourism: MINAE (the park) and the ICT (promotion, etc.), but there is no communication between the two so for example, there are no impact studies, etc. They just keep sending tourists and the environment here is very fragile... and the first (main) reason for the parks isn’t (isn’t supposed to be) tourism, its protection (R51, 2004).

Others emphasized the lack of cooperation between the park and the Development Association, the CCC and the village, and the general lack of organized environmental management.

The tourism lodges are also criticized in the alternative story, for not ‘pulling their environmental weight.’ There is also vibrant local gossiping about the ‘bad’ and sometimes illegal environmental practices of the lodges. For example, there is a widely held belief that many of the lodges dump their wastes illegally in areas surrounding the village, sometimes including into bodies of water. Several respondents also offered examples of lodge managers and staff behaving in irresponsible/undesirable ways. For example, one respondent said: “hotel captains don’t respect velocity rules”, endangering the community, and also suggested that the hotels “cut palms that they are not allowed to, without permission” (R9, 2003). Lodges are seen as particularly problematic because, not only do they generate considerable impacts, they are perceived as reaping the lion’s share of economic benefits (see next section). For example, with respect to the solid
waste management crisis, they are seen as prime generators of waste and as being insufficiently involved (if at all) with resolving the solid waste management problems.

It is important to note that local respondents do not just blame ‘other’ actors in the alternative story. Many respondents included elements of self-blame in their answers to questions about the environment, and implicated community members in the creation of environmental problems and/or in environmental management shortcomings. This is especially true when discussing local solid waste management failings. Respondents recognize the community’s lack of cooperation and persistent dedication to resolving waste issues as problems, alongside the lack of formal solid waste management expertise and infrastructure. In explaining the solid waste management crisis, for example, people often replied with phrases such as “no tenemos cultura” and “falta educacion”, referring to a local lack of environmental awareness, the lack of a waste management culture/mentality, and apathy that exists among certain locally-living people (see Chapter 4, this thesis):

... The people are very calm here (tranquilo); they like their calm. No one does anything; no one asks about impacts, no one asks anything about the piles of garbage that they see. They don’t think of impacts. (...). There are opportunities but this is a difficult community; there is no mentality for the future. People live for today... (R7, 2003).

... the people are not aware of the damage that they are causing to the environment. I know that they run (educational) campaigns here but the people are not inclined; they do not have the disposition” (R66, 2004).
As asked to identify barriers to improved local environmental management, a woman answered the following: “I think that it’s ourselves. We are not organizing ourselves, we are just remaining calm (tranquilo). There is no respect (no hay respeto)” (R57, 2004). One respondent elaborated on the local lack of awareness and action, however, by ‘scaling up’ to the global level and suggesting that the people in Tortuguero have the same problems as everyone else:

It is a problem of the whole human race. No one wants to pay. (It’s a problem of conscientization (awareness); a problem of not teaching (environmental education) to young people for example: about trees, animals and which (animals) not to eat. Sometimes people come who just don’t care and just throw stuff (throw garbage on the ground) (R75, 2004).

Some respondents also acknowledge themselves as part of the larger community and/or as individuals, as being a part of both the problem and the solution:

… people have to organize themselves and realize that we have to do it ourselves. It’s shameful that tourists walk by garbage and it’s a problem that we don’t get seriously organized. Come on, let’s do it. (R22, 2003).

In summary, most respondents were not satisfied with local environmental management and all respondents identified at least one environmental problem in their interviews; many discussed several problems or impacts of concern at length and challenged the ‘official story’ claim that Tortuguero is ‘environmentally successful’. Instead, the ‘alternative version’ of the story suggests that ecotourism might be
'succeeding' at the expense of the local environment. While respondents call upon key actors (e.g. the park and MINAE, the CCC, the municipality, the ICT, and tourism lodges) to take action against what are perceived as worsening environmental problems, they also view themselves as integral to improving the quality of the local environment and finding ‘solutions’ to local environmental problems. This is perhaps because respondents typically cited the future of their tourism-based livelihoods as being inextricably linked to the state-of-the-local-environment. Two local turtle/jungle guides summed up such local concerns in the following statements:

With respect to the future of tourism, if the people keep following this course, there will come a moment when tourists won’t come anymore- this course is really bad- 10 more years and there will be a drop in tourism here. (R58, 2004).

...You know, every tourist site has its carrying capacity. Now, we have 50,000 tourists here. If we have more, it will start to degenerate and lose its attractiveness, and start to die. (R48, 2003).

It is not only those directly employed in tourism that express such sentiments; an older woman said the following:

And here in the village, the only source of work is tourism so, if tourists stop coming, we won’t have work so... we have to take care of the nature because if we don’t, they will stop coming. This is what I’ve seen since I’ve been here. Tortuguero is dependent on tourism and nature, the things that are here (R55, 2004).
Respondents question the nature of ecotourism development

The most prominent theme with respect to respondent views of (eco)tourism development in Tortuguero it is one of great local appreciation for the wealth, jobs and improved standard of living associated with it. There is an impressive level of awareness among many respondents of the scale of the industry, such as the most recent tourist number estimates, and the types and amounts of revenues being generated, with some people providing very accurate estimates of visitation and revenue before they appear in written reports. Respondents also highlight non-monetary gains and general improvements that they associate with the advent of tourism, some of which serve to re-enforce ideas of ecotourism ‘as salvation’ (Campbell, Gray, and Meletis (2007)):

Well, tourism gives happiness to the village (…). It gives happiness to the village because people go here and there so… (…) I see it as being good because they don’t come to bother anything, they just come to be happy and make other people happy too; they come to learn about everything” (R56, 2004).

(regarding tourists) Um… they appear to be very good, to me, because they help the community of Tortuguero out economically and culturally. They remind us that we have to look after our place because (people come here) to learn about Costa Rica; we are a community with solidarity and that is participating in Costa Rica (R62, 2004).

Thus, to a large extent, local people repeat the central elements of the official story. However, they also raise concerns about the tourism economy, and these concerns are at the core of the alternative story.
A major concern among respondents is about the way costs and benefits are distributed, and as mentioned in the previous section, lodges are the target of much criticism: “The hotels get 99% of the benefits and the village only gets about 1%” (R53, 2004). The focus on the lodges is perhaps not surprising, as the lodges sit at the top of the local ‘ecotourism hierarchy’; they house most of the tourists who visit Tortuguero, they are the biggest employers, and they receive the greatest revenues. There is a (real and perceived) imbalance of power:

Well, the big hotels have all the tourists, they rule everything- the little tours that come to the village are not enough for it to survive- there is not too much to say about it- that’s how they can live…. It’s for sure, everything in Tortuguero is the same, the hotels control everything, the turses, the tours, everything, the village has very little to survive. The hotels are using the village for their purpose. (They just want to take them on tours through the village). There is nothing that the village can do. Even if the hotels gave 10% of their tourists to the village, they wouldn’t do it (...). And they pay nasty salaries (...). It’s very hard to think about it, but what can you do? Nothing. (R52, 2004).

…More growth in Tortuguero means more poverty because more bigger companies (means) less opportunity for the (small) people. (R8, 2003).

Both of the above quotes are related to issues of ownership, and the second respondent above also addressed this more directly: “Businesses here are not owned by natives. It is a different type of work from what come before it here, like bananas and machete work. (Jobs) are the only benefit, really” (R8, 2003). For reasons such as these, some locally-living residents view the lodges (and lodge owners) as ‘outsiders’.
Many locally-living people share the sentiment that the lodges appear to be operating ‘above the law’ and/or that their actions and impacts are not adequately being monitored. As a result, negative talk or gossip about the lodges is commonplace. For instance, there are rumors about lodges expanding without proper permission/permits, and, as mentioned previously, dumping their wastes illegally. Overall, respondents question of the ‘eco’ motivations of the lodges (hotels), as compared with their drive for profits. The lodges are also perceived by some to be working together against the community’s development interests, focusing on profit-driven development for themselves rather than tourism as a development project for the entire community. For example, when discussing a proposed map of the village, the same respondent cited above suggested that “the hotels don’t want a map because they don’t want people to be able to see other choices” (R8, 2003). He suggested that the lodges collude to keep tourists misinformed and dependent on their services. It is a common sentiment that the lodges purposefully create enclave environments for their tourists, and restrict their freedom in terms of travel to the village and their ability to make their own touring and purchasing choices. He even claimed that the lodges pay travel writers to write negative comments about the village in travel books: “… They say that (there is) crime and rape in the village; that it is unsafe. The lodges portray themselves as secure (and) professional. (This is) very ugly and strong propaganda. Almost all the large hotels do
it” (R8, 2003). Meletis heard similar stories from various village residents and also spoke with two tourists who admitted to being warned about safety in the village by lodge staff members.

As mentioned at the end of the previous section, respondents are worried about: the type of tourism development \textit{(massification)} occurring in Tortuguero; the speed of tourism development in Tortuguero, the increasing numbers of tourists to the area. Some respondents suggested that tourism in the village is shifting towards more mass-tourism oriented tourism (package-oriented ecotourism) and that problems are resulting:

(Referring to tourism) It’s my business. It’s great to a certain extent, (but) there were more conservation types (tourists) before; people who cared. Now there are more package tourists (looking for) 2-for-1, drinks included… It all ties together; it’s not well managed. It’s not carefully… On the whole, it’s still good— you’re not seeing people come just for party reasons but you are seeing more of that (R28, 2003).

Another respondent noted that tourism “(is) not very well planned and it’s growing at a bad rhythm (pace)” (R51, 2004). The worry is that the tourism industry is unchecked and growing out of control and this will have consequences for the environment and the industry’s future: “For me, the greatest threat is the destruction of our environment. It is being destroyed” (R61, 2004). In the case of tourism planning and development, local discourse focuses on actors such as the ICT, the park and
MINAE and the regional municipality, rather than the lodges. There is a sense of abandonment in terms of their failure to support the village as it struggles with some of the secondary impacts of tourism development, such as a growing population and related need for increased services (e.g. health care, education, infrastructure):

I don’t know why, whether it’s the power of God, but we all live well; because here, we don’t have (authorities who do something) (we live well despite the lack of effective authorities). (Explanation) If you complain to the police, they don’t do anything. They tell you to go to Guapiles and file a denuncia (official charge/complaint). It’s so far, so people don’t want to go. I think that there should be more authority here (R52, 2003).

A common accusation with respect to the ICT and the national government in general is that they continue to promote tourism in Tortuguero without offering adequate support or funding to maintain it and/or to help the village deal with the consequences of its expansion. Discussing the role of the park and the national government in tourism to the area, one respondent suggested that associated funding was the biggest challenge:

Underfunded. Underline it, put it in bold, or write it down again. It’s a joke; (it’s) present in the whole system. (The are) still throwing money at old coffee families; they are better taken care of than the tourism industry- national parks are the base of this… it’s shameful. Riding on a wave of what people created 20 years ago, only on paper. They market the hell out of it, but they don’t support it. They’ve had to sell it to Crystal (a Costa Rican beverage bottling company). It’s a joke; the state should help. Parks used to be free. (They) took away the state budget with the introduction of entrance fees (R21, 2003).
Respondents also raised questions about the nature of the tourism economy and work in it. For example, respondents alluded to ‘cannibalistic type’ tactics being used to win customers and business within the industry. People complained of ‘unfair competition’ between village businesses such as cabinas and local actors such as turtle guides and transportation company operators. For instance, there was talk of some guides undercutting other guides’ prices; a practice frowned upon by most guides since there is supposed to be a standard turtle tour price, and since the guides are supposed to ‘work together’ to satisfy the tourism demand (e.g. the reason they formed the guide association). Respondents also talked about some guides ‘hoarding’ customers by approaching them first with offers of tours and other services, and then selling off the ‘extras’ (more than their allotted turtle tour group size) to other guides; the guides ‘purchasing’ these extra tourists had to pay a commission to do so, and endure a resulting pay cut in their tour income. There was also gossip about people and companies ‘preying’ on tourists at key spots such as bus terminals and piers and becoming territorial and threatening if other people tried to interact with ‘their tourists’.

Respondents also complained about working conditions in the local ecotourism industry, voicing their opposition to certain practices. Several respondents complained about the working conditions at the lodges (salaries, shift length, policies re: days off) and some even suggest that the abuse of workers persists despite its ‘eco-reputation’ and
its success as an ecotourism destination. One woman commented on working conditions in a local lodge by saying: “I worked in a shrimp processing factory in Nicaragua from 5am to 2pm. It was very hard work but the hours were easier than working at the lodges here” (R65, 2004). Many respondents and other locally-living people switched jobs frequently in 2003 and 2004, and workers repeatedly showed up to work late or otherwise engaged in behaviors such as taking abnormally long breaks, wandering off during assigned tasks, or ignoring employers’ orders; such actions reflect the reality of the labor market in Tortuguero (wide availability of unskilled service-sector employment), but can also be interpreted as a form of protest against working conditions.

Respondents also singled out problems associated with the rise of tourism employment in the area. For instance, many respondents view drug use among locally-living people as something that has grown alongside tourism and as being linked to tourism-related higher rates of disposable income in the village:

… It has gotten worse; drugs have increased; conflicts have increased. Things used to be calm (and there wasn’t) as much drinking and drugs. (There have been) changes. The society here is not the same as it was 7 years ago- it was calm- not as much drug use or alcoholism” (R20, 2003).

When I first moved here, no one had money, they all had gardens and hunted and it was hard but… There were the same drunks back then as now but it used to be once a month. Now, it’s much more often than that; the addictions are a lot worse. People used to get high in my husband’s generation too but now people
are high and they are high all of the time now; it’s their life now. I’d never smell it; now I smell it all the time- they smoke continuously (R28, 2003).

Respondents mentioned other negative social and economic impacts of tourism as well. For instance, one respondent referred to the increased cost of living associated with tourism, and questioned the fairness of local people being ‘taxed’ for tourism success through high prices for daily expenses; he questions the legality of such differential pricing:

(Another problem here) is the mark-up of 200% (on) basic needs. For example, a kilo of tomatoes is 100 colones in San Jose and 300 colones in Tortuguero. (They say it is for transportation) and that is true but you can increase prices legally by 40-50%. The extra charge is sanctioned theft (lobo permitido); there is no price control (R9, 2003).

Lastly, the ‘alternative story of ecotourism in Tortuguero’ includes concerns regarding Tortuguero’s increasing dependency on tourism as its economic mainstay and its only true on-site industry. Respondents frequently voiced concerns about dependency and raised questions the potential impacts for locally-living people if tourism were to begin to decline or to disappear:

For me, it’s good, because (tourism) is what we live off of. If tourists didn’t come, how would we live? (What would we live off of?) (R54, 2004).

If tourism left, we would have no money, no work- nothing- so the place would just change (R59, 2004).
Tourism is the greatest source of income. If tourism ends, then so will Tortuguero. Yes so now… if tourism ends, so do we. We only have hotels (and things like that), we don’t have agriculture and things like that anymore, because the park (controls the land) (R53, 2004).

In summary, the alternative story of ecotourism as development in Tortuguero is not straightforward. While the dominant sentiment expressed by almost all respondents is one of appreciation (for jobs and income), there are a wide variety of concerns related to how the tourism industry is structured (and particularly the dominance of the lodges), how it is managed (or not managed), social and cultural repercussions of tourism development, and the village’s dependence on it. None of these perceived negative consequences of the tourism economy necessarily detract from overall support for it, but their absence from ‘the official story’ makes addressing these concerns difficult.

**Respondents want turtles alive and dead?**

The mantra ‘a turtle is worth more alive than dead’ and the values that accompany it are reinforced in/by certain segments of village life. The prominence of the pro-ecotourism, pro-conservation mantra ‘a turtle is worth more alive than dead’ and the assumptions behind it (grounded in a Western-influenced conservation ethic) are reflected throughout the village. They are present on display boards in the Park’s tourist information centre, and have entered into the local lexicon. Many of the local
turtle guides and outside guides incorporate the phrase and associated concepts into their speech when dealing with tourists or foreign researchers. For example, when asked about the biggest benefit of tourism for Tortuguero, an ‘outside guide’ answered as follows:

Jobs. Otherwise, they’ll be hunting manatees; turtles would be extinct. There are no manatees. There are no pavonas (peacocks). Having the money gives them access to different types of food; it gives them access to things that they would have had to take from the forest (R78, 2004).

Similarly, a local respondent described the changes associated with the advent of ecotourism in the following way: “If it wasn’t for tourism, we’d be eating a turtle per day; we’d be hunting and eating turtles” (R73, 2004). These statements reinforce the official story, as do local concerns about illegal harvesting of sea turtles and their eggs; many respondents view threats to turtles as potential threats to local livelihoods:

Poaching; what is the government doing? They know tourism is an economic base here and that that everyone eats turtles and eggs in Limón, and no one stops them. It needs vigilance to decrease it (R20, 2003).

Also, the park should do a better job of preventing poaching for eggs and meat, by drug addicts, for example; they should control this, it is damaging our future. They should take greater care; be stricter (R58, 2004).

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15 The term ‘outside guide’ is used to denote a guide from outside of Tortuguero, who works in Tortuguero (e.g. accompanies tours through the village) but is neither from nor living in Tortuguero.
In spite of both local repetition of the phrase ‘a turtle is worth more alive than
dead’ (or variations on it), there is evidence that not all residents embrace the new use of
sea turtles as ecotourist attractions, at least not exclusively. For example, Peskin (2002)
found that even among a small percentage of guides, the local people who benefit most
directly from turtle based tourism (Campbell 2002a), there is some desire to consume a
small number of turtles. Furthermore, even though everyone in Tortuguero knows that
the taking of turtles and their eggs is illegal and punishable by fines and jail time, and
that sea turtles are among the biggest local tourism draws, illegal use still exists. During
the lead author’s fieldwork, she witnessed and heard about many incidents of egg
poaching. Covert poaching operations aside, she repeatedly saw certain individuals
walking through the village in broad daylight, their shirts stuffed with turtle eggs. She
heard gossip about locally poached turtles and about turtle meat ‘surfacing’ in the
village, and she had foreign friends who were offered and accepted (prepared) turtle
eggs from locally-living people. She overheard many CCC accounts of dealings with
poachers. There were also incidents where ‘sick’ and injured (speared) turtles turned up
in nearby places, accompanied by rumors of people having to abandon their (illegal)
catch for fear of being caught. The lead author also attended a party at which turtle eggs
were proudly being served to visiting guests until a member of the CCC arrived. The
party was hosted by a family that is benefiting healthily from the tourism economy in
various ways (Campbell et al. 2006). While the official story attributes poaching activities to outsiders and a few hopeless cases, the lead author’s observations indicate some local involvement and residual desire among some people to consume turtle meat or eggs despite appreciation for turtles’ roles in ecotourism and local livelihoods.

Regardless of their involvement or lack of involvement in the poaching of or consumption of turtle products, locally-living people also forwarded alternative conceptualizations of how turtle conservation should be. For example, some locally-living people spoke fondly of ‘simpler times’ that included: 1) less conservation-related intervention, legislation and regulations, and 2) increased local access to resources, such as an historic village-allocated turtle quota that allowed a consumption of turtle meat and eggs (outlawed in 1999) (Troëng, Ranstam, and Rankin 2002). Respondents also challenged the notion that consuming turtle meat is inherently incompatible with supporting turtle conservation. Several respondents suggested alternatives to the park system’s current non-extractive policies, such as a park-sanctioned return to the village-allocated turtle quota as a nod to local culture. Others feel that the park staff should at least surrender turtles freshly killed by jaguars to interested village people so that 1) the park’s non-consumptive policy will not be violated, 2) the local demand for turtle meat will be satisfied without poaching, and 3) the meat will not go to waste (participant observation 2003-2004). This last scenario suggests not only an awareness of the
ecotourism and conservation ethics, as well as park policy, but also a unique form of resistance to the current state-of-affairs which seeks to reconcile local needs with larger ecotourism values and constraints. Such viewpoints that accommodate both turtle tourism and consuming turtle products do not fit comfortably within the Western influenced non-extractive ‘official story’ of ecotourism in Tortuguero and suggest that local people might still see value in dead turtles as well.

Residual resentment about being denied access to resources and/or being inadequately compensated for lost land or access rights (e.g. when village land was appropriated for the creation of TNP in the 1970s) also persists among some village residents. In addition, respondents are aware that certain organizations and people view the ‘community of Tortuguero’ as being incapable of managing their own environment, and they reject such notions. This perceived lack of a local conservation/environmental management ethic is alluded to in the following quote, in which a local respondent challenges the claim that conservation now (e.g. including legislation; restricted access) is a better choice for the village. This claim is a key component of the mantra ‘a turtle is worth more alive than dead’ because the mantra implies that local people have been convinced of the merits of turtle conservation and ecotourism. This quote is taken from a response to the interview question: What do you think about the beach?:

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The problem is deep (serious) because well, before there were canals and tourism, when we lived in other times, on the beach, we used to live differently. It was something very healthy and we used to practice conservation in a different way, like the old dwellers of the village. If you killed a turtle, you had to eat all of it, and if you caught a small fish, you had to throw it back. Because if (my ancestors) hadn’t conserved it (nature), there wouldn’t be anything here now for the tourists. But then, we lost the happiness and freedom, punto. Why did we lose it? In those times, there weren’t a lot of police, no police, and we were very happy. But with the arrival of development like the canals, came the start of immigrants from the Central Valley and other areas, and the destroyers of nature. And that is when the law had to come to protect nature, like park guards for example. And I think that it’s a mistake that they generalized the laws. This is what caused the unhappiness of the people living on (at) the beach; it’s not beautiful like it used to be (R72, 2004).

The respondent disagrees with the conservation-related imposition of laws that treat local people ‘like everybody else’ (exhibited in his reference to ‘generalized’ laws). He is also nostalgic for the type of community-imposed conservation culture that used to exist (e.g. people would use the whole turtle that they killed) and suggests that a loss of local freedom and a decreasingly healthy environment are two of the costs associated with the growth of tourism and conservation in the village—these are not adequately dealt with in ‘the official story of ecotourism in Tortuguero’, where the focus is on a theorized local realization that it is better to use turtles for tourism than to kill them for meat, eggs, etc.
Respondents problematize ‘the community of Tortuguero’ and question participation

A few respondents echoed the portrayal of ‘the official story of ecotourism in Tortuguero’ by referring to the community as a unit and suggesting a certain degree of cohesiveness between community members. For example, one respondent, described the village’s role in national tourism as follows: “...we are a community with solidarity and that is participating in Costa Rica” (R62, 2004). Most respondents interviews, however: 1) touch on the difficulties in defining the ‘community of Tortuguero’, 2) stress the lack of unity within the ‘community’, and 3) challenge notions that the community, however defined, is actively participating in decision-making about tourism development.

Respondent statements contradict the notion of Tortuguero as a neatly unified community, and this is unsurprising given the magnitude of change and speed at which this has occurred since the early 1990s. An insider/outsider discourse is prevalent in Tortuguero, with insiders and outsiders defined according to the unique perspective of the definer. For example, definitions are strongly tied to personal and family histories (e.g. place of origin; date of arrival; total time in the village). The Nicaraguan population in Tortuguero is a contentious topic of debate among many people in the village, for instance. Some people distinguish between the Nicaraguans who have been here longer
(e.g. those who came from Bluefields in Tortuguero’s early days), and newer arrivals (who have come within the last 10 years or so to work in tourism). Some also separate the Latino Nicaraguans (who, for the most part, have arrived later) from the black Caribbean Nicaraguans (some earlier arrivals and relatives/friends of those earlier arrivals). Some view Nicaraguans as contributing to life in Tortuguero, and others view them as ‘outsiders’ and/or blame them for many problems, as the following quote illustrates:

It is actually overpopulated (there are too many people). The majority are Nicaraguans. The population is too much and many are Nicas, they only care about work and money for their families at home (in Nicaragua), they don’t care about Tortuguero (R58, 2004).

A second group often classified as outsiders is made up of the few Europeans and North Americans who have chosen to settle in Tortuguero village in the last twenty years. For example, gossip and ‘character assassination’ (Scott 1985) abound about foreign tourism guides who live in the village. In the following quote, a locally-living turtle guide epitomizes the resentment towards two foreign guides based in the village (pseudonyms protect their identities):

(Tourism is) very good for the whole village but there are many who are abusing it. Everyone has the right to earn money. In the books there are two guides in Tortuguero: Susan and Tom. They say that they are biologists but I have heard them say things that aren’t true. I have read a lot too. They both came here and now (they take work from others); they came from the outside and do what they want. They (Tom) sell off the extra people to other guides and pay them less.
John was working for him and now he (Tom) gave the work to David (Tom’s brother in law). (You are supposed to pay commission to the boat captains) but he (Tom) doesn’t pay commission because he says that the people come straight to him. No guides agree with what Susan and Tom do. (something re: lowering prices). Tom always has more people than he can handle. (I don’t accept Tom’s clients anymore) (R30, 2003).

Some people have taken measures in order to ‘restore the balance’ and draw business away from foreigners who live in the village. For instance, one of these foreign guides claimed that someone had been telling tourists who asked for them that they no longer lived or worked in the village or that they had died (R29, 2003). Views range from annoyance and resentment of foreign guides (pseudonyms have been used), to something more extreme:

Two things are big problems. Susan and Tom. I know that they are strangers like myself but sometime they’ve got to learn about the youth in Tortuguero. They speak bad about people here and that’s what makes problems. They might even go home in a casket (R42, 2003).

Resentment is often targeted at these specific and successful ‘outsiders’ because they live in the village and compete for jobs (and tourists) with other locally-living people. While lodges (and their owners and upper management) also tend to be viewed as outsiders, since they are located outside of the village proper and are owned by extra-local people (foreign and Costa Rican), they don’t attract the same level of resentment.
The categorization of Nicaraguans and other foreigners as outsiders is more generalized, and emphasizes their different values and ways of life:

There are ideas from foreigners that moved here and there is Costa Rican resistance. (The foreigners) can’t tell them what to do, they should adapt to the Costa Rican way of life. (Tom) wants wooden houses and sand paths. He should go home and do this instead. (It’s like asking them to wear loincloths) (R8, 2003).

The popular use of binaries such as insider/outsider, Tico/Nica, and oldtimer/newcomer, as well as other divisions that run deep within the village culture such as gender-related conflicts (e.g. between the local women’s association and ‘machismo’ cultural norms) and factions between different local political camps illustrate the difficulty of referring to Tortuguero as a community. In recent years, the ‘community’ label has become even more problematic due to the emergence of an increasingly permanent squatter settlement (San Francisco or el Cerro) just outside of the village. People from the squatter community come and go from the village but are typically viewed by those living in the village as being outside the community (and illegal).

The perceived group distinctions and divisions contribute to the lack of unity cited by many of the respondents as being a problem in the village. Respondents often referred to ‘lack of unity in the community’ along side statements of self-blame regarding local problems:
The threats to the village aren’t from tourism, they are from ourselves. Everyone has to find work and (stop) giving bad information about others. That there are only two guides? This is bad information. We need unity to work together. (me: there is a lack of cooperation?). Exactly, there is a lack of unity. (R30, 2003).

Another respondent forwarded the idea that individualism is detracting from creating unity within the community:

…I feel like everyone is hauling for their own side. I feel so; that’s how I feel. Everyone is in their own groups, doing their own thing. (Especially), I feel that the men (with their machismo) do this; they keep us back instead of putting us in-line (R77, 2004).

A common complaint was that the community’s lack of unity is linked to its lack of organization, its culture of apathy, and its lack of awareness:

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A common complaint was that the community’s lack of unity is linked to its lack of organization, its culture of apathy, and its lack of awareness:

...(the community) should be made aware of/made conscious of the garbage, the canals, the ocean. They should be more coordinated with the (goal) of improving/reducing environmental contamination/pollution. (...) The community thinks in the moment; takes advantage of the moment and nothing more (R44, 2003).

The community is completely disorganized, maybe due to immaturity, maybe due to a lack of experience... which comes back to immaturity (R70, 2004).

The lack of a permanent municipal authority presence in the village exacerbates conflicts within the community, as people move into opposing political camps and insider/outsider categories, without an official authority to negotiate or mediate.
In terms of participation, some respondents see locally-living people as having limited agency, especially in contrast to powerful entities, such as the lodges, the park administration, and the ICT. For example, one respondent contrasted her lack of power as a guide with the power of institutions that should contribute to making positive changes for the future: “There are people who have the power to change things, not us the guides and not the tourists; it’s the official agencies, MINAE, and the hotels” (R78, 2004). Another respondent suggested that leaders ignore the opinions of local people: “… Leaders are the largest obstacle to management because the lower people’s opinions, los terceros (the third party or least important members), don’t matter to them” (R20, 2003). Ironically, the same respondent also denied others’ rights to participate by stating that “Outsiders don’t have the right to (give an opinion)” (R20, 2003).

Some respondents link the aforementioned lack of unity to the community’s lack of power. One respondent viewed the lack of unity as making people easy targets for ‘lodge domination’; he also implicated the lodges (hotels) in creating disunity in the community:

We are lacking culture and understanding in the village, so hotels create disorder in the community. There is a tendency for large hotels to control almost all the tourism here. (They produce) disorder here. (The community is lacking in unity). For example, people don’t know their neighbors and will therefore lose a lot of advantages because they are not organized in the ways that the hotels are (R9, 2003).
Other respondents challenged the ‘official story’ regarding participation and community-park cooperation, by going as far as to suggest that the park might be strategically attempting to prevent the community from uniting in order to maintain their control and autonomy and to keep the community from becoming a stronger political entity:

(Regarding park-community relations….) My own personal feeling (…) is that it’s partially because they’re inefficient and partly because they don’t want (anything else, like the community-run commission) here to succeed. If a community-run commission succeeds, it’s the start of a community-run park, and that’s the last thing that they want to see. For example, in Cahuita16, with Gary (pseudonym), a park service employee, the park hates him because it works in Cahuita; it works because he has given the community a lot of power. They burned down the park post… (R64, 2004).

… In the laws, participation of the park in conservation management exists, but not in reality. (…) The government doesn’t have the capacity to manage so (they) don’t want civil society to participate because they will be better; they don’t want to lose ground. The park is jealous of civil society because they are smarter. Parks don’t want civil society to get involved (R8, 2003).

According to local respondents, participation opportunities that do exist are generally ill-conceived, superficial, and often introduced too late. A good example of this was when the ICT hosted a series of day-long workshops for ‘small business owners’ in Tortuguero, in the summer of 2004. The even was accessible in that it held

16 The park in Cahuita is run in a very unique way, rather than MINAE having jurisdiction and control over the park, the community created a board that runs the park. The community took over management of the park (including fee collection) after its members rebelled against park authority (Girot, Weitzner, and Borrás no date).
locally, was free of charge, and all necessary materials (and food) were provided for attendees, but in other respects, its format seemed designed to guarantee minimal participation from village-based small business owners. It took place at one of the lodges outside of the village (attendees needed boat access to attend, eliminating those that could not find a way across the lagoon), during the day (peak business hours, eliminating those who had to work during the day), during the green turtle season (one of the busiest tourist times of the year for everyone). The invitations were also unevenly distributed and most people in the village were unaware of the workshop despite its emphasis on ‘local participation’.

There was also ‘loud grumbling’ (Scott 1985) within the village with respect to who gets asked to participate in different venues and projects. For instance, some respondents complain that it is always the same (and apparently wrong) people who get asked to represent the village in meetings, on boards, and in councils. Many take particular issue with the inclusion of foreigners living in the village, such as one particular turtle guide who is frequently asked to participate and/or provided with platforms of authority. Patterns of ‘participation’ and non-participation seem to exacerbate existing intra-community conflicts (and political camps). For example, with the exception of the president of the Guide Association, a handful of children performing a play, and the several local restaurant owners and workers preparing the
meals for visiting delegates, community members were not invited to the official park-hosted ceremony for the opening of the green turtle nesting season (one of two key tourism seasons) in 2003. Interestingly, several guest speakers at the event mentioned the important role of involving the community during their speeches. No posters had been posted in the village, no announcements or invitations were made, and when the lead author asked people if they were going, they claimed to not know about it or to not have been invited. In contrast, the CCC volunteers, some of whom would only spend a few days in the village and most of whom are foreigners, were all invited.

Non-participation also occurs with respect to everyday park-related affairs in the village. Some locally-living people sometimes refuse to interact with park staff and/or refuse to follow park rules since they object to ‘what the park stands for’ in the village (e.g. sometimes locally-living guides get their guide permits temporarily revoked when they are caught breaking rules on the beach during nesting season). The strained relationship between the park and the village was recognized by park employees in their interviews, with some admitting that they are afraid to be in the village alone, or to go to the local bars. They hinted at knowing the park had not been very effective at involving local people, with most of the interactions with local people consisting of punitive interactions such as chasing poachers, making arrests, and issuing warnings and fines. They also admitted to being ignored and/or being made fun of upon entering village
spaces (personal communications with park staff 2003; 2004). A park employee provided this example of the type of scenario that can result in people refusing to acknowledge their presence and/or refusing to interact with them:

There are a lot of good friends of the park, of administrators of the park. They have to apply the environmental laws and these affect certain people and (frustrate) their interests so the people who will lose out will always have poor relations with the parks (e.g. with respect to turtle eggs, turtle meat). And also, some of these people will feel like enemies of the employees because we arrested their brothers, etc. For example, one year ago, a man was caught with a turtle. He was caught and a denuncia (official written complaint/charge) was made. So of course, his family doesn’t look well upon the park (conversation with a park employee, 2004).

Unhappy with number and/or quality of official opportunities to participate, some locally-living community members work hard to create and maintain alternative spaces for participation. They form countless committees and subcommittees related to community matters, for instance, and they also hold informal meetings at peoples’ houses to discuss pressing issues. Unsatisfied with the lack of government-led action to preserve a local hill known as El Cerro de Tortuguero, for example, various actors including several local businessmen and turtle guides formed a board/panel to bring actors including park staff together, in the hopes of finding a new way to preserve the hill and mitigate some of the impacts it is currently facing from overuse by tourist groups (R48, 2003).
Local participation is also high when it comes to matters/events that interest large portions of the community, such as sports-related events, some school-related events, and celebratory events such as holiday activities. Although they have seem to experience strong ebbs and flows of membership, participation, and support, local political organizations such as the Development Association, the Women’s Association, and the Guides’ Association do also entail local participation. It does however seem that such community-based participation is in constant flux and that some organizations replace others in terms of local respect and importance, over time. For instance, the Guides’ Association, a historically respected and locally successful organization (Peskin 2002) seemed to be losing a degree of public support and respect (2003-2004). For example, Meletis overheard talk of several local guides refusing to pay their contributions to the association, starting in the summer of 2003. Residents of Tortuguero are therefore also actively choosing to participate in or ignore various activities on offer. Their non-participation must therefore not be dismissed as mere apathy, especially since evidence of their ability to mobilize and organize exists in other domains of village life (e.g. sports tournaments; community social events).
**Discussion**

**Is the alternative story of ecotourism in Tortuguero evidence of resistance?**

The data presented in this paper suggest that locally-living people in Tortuguero are engaging in (acts and statements of) resistance to components of the ecotourism industry in Tortuguero that they disagree with or reject. If we consider the component themes of ‘the official story of ecotourism in Tortuguero’ alongside the behaviors and statements showcased in ‘the alternative story’, resistance becomes a useful lens to interpret the interview and participant observation-collected data presented here. In this section, we consider the utility of this lens as a frame for the ‘alternative story’; we draw upon the work of various resistance scholars, most notably Scott (Scott 1985).

**‘Everyday resistance’ to tourism development**

In Scott’s (1985) *Weapons of The Weak*, he uses the term ‘public transcript’ to represent the way things appear to be in a society, and the term ‘hidden transcript’ to represent what is ‘really going on’ in a society. This hidden transcript is often where acts of ‘everyday resistance’ take place and it is sometimes hidden so deep that even the
actors resisting are not fully aware that they are doing it17 (Scott 1985). Scott’s concept of everyday resistance as being part of how a community responds to undergoing an economic (and therefore a social, cultural, and environmental) shift, seems especially relevant in many ecotourism-based communities of the Global South, since they have often undergone various economic incarnations before settling into (often foreign-actor led) tourism development as a new economic base (Weaver 1998; Campbell 1999; Honey 1999; Mowforth and Munt 1998). For one, the transition from extractive economies to tourism or ecotourism, a service industry catering mainly to ‘outsiders’ entails many social, cultural, and environmental changes (Thrupp 1990). This host of associated changes is likely to increase the possibility of resistance occurring given the various levels of change such communities must face simultaneously, especially given the colonial links of tourism in many places, often without adequate locally-existing resources to facilitate such major transitions (Hall 1994).

Scott’s concepts of ‘everyday resistance’, and public vs. hidden transcripts also fit well with concepts from tourism-related literature, such as MacCannell’s tourism dichotomy of frontstage/backstage, which he uses to contrast the (easily visible) version of a host destination and its people, culture, and environment that tourists see when

17 In the case of Tortuguero, we focus on more overt actions and statements that can be interpreted as resistance, not on deeply hidden resistance.
visiting the frontstage with the actual nature of the local people, culture, and environment, including any tensions, conflicts or other problems that it includes— the backstage (MacCannell 1973). This frontstage/backstage metaphor helps to explain why subtler forms of everyday resistance may make more sense in tourism destinations, especially in ones heavily dependent on ecotourism for their economic survival. Organized resistance such as labor strikes can be very risky for tourism workers; inappropriate public behavior could compromise associated tourism images and related livelihoods (Weaver 2005).

Tourism can be conceptualized as operating with a hierarchy of tourism employment and ownership complete with a tourism ‘underclass’ (those providing the labor and/or being restricted to lower rungs of the tourism economy hierarchy) that stands to ‘loose too much’ (possible negative consequences: e.g. sanctions; lost wages; lost jobs) by engaging in formal, organized resistance (Weaver 2005). Everyday resistance then becomes the less risky and more apt choice. For example, overt resistance is not viable in the ‘off the beaten path’ tourism destination of a Rarámuri community in Northern Mexico. With acts of overt resistance sometimes leading to beatings and/or death, it is deemed too risky (Levi 1999). Community members therefore employ everyday resistance such as foot dragging (Scott 1985) and performance as resistance instead. They adopt a leisurely work pace as non-aggressive
resistance to Mestizo domination, and they employ stereotypes, jokes and euphemisms as ‘safer’ forms of resistance, creating a dialogue of resistance with the dominant group (Levi 1999). Everyday resistance better fits with life in tourist destinations characterized by an unequal balance of power between the working class and the tourism ‘powers that be’.

Scott (1985) also provides examples of everyday resistance-type behaviors: foot dragging, dissimulation (hiding), false compliance, pilfering, loud grumbling, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, backbiting gossip, character assassination, using rude nicknames, and using silence as contempt (Scott 1985: xvi, xvii) that prove useful in interpreting components of ‘the alternative story of ecotourism in Tortuguero’ as resistance. For example, some of the spoken resistance in Tortuguero takes the form of complaints or what Scott would call ‘loud grumbling’ (Scott 1985). Examples include those respondents who lament certain local cultural losses and/or complain about social problems in the village, and associate these losses or the speed at which these losses are occurring, with the advent of tourism18 (e.g. drug use). Respondents also ‘grumble’ about the unfairness of actors such as the lodges, the Park, the CCC and the ICT promoting and benefiting from the local environment, without adequately contributing,

18 Tourism, for instance, has made English and Spanish the two most important spoken languages, endangering the traditional Creole English spoken by early Black Caribbean settlers in Tortuguero, and contributing to the Hispanicization of the village.
financially or otherwise, to the preservation, management and remediation of it.

Similarly, many local respondents question and complain about the current distribution of opportunities and revenues with respect to tourism employment and entry into the industry, citing shortcomings such as the lack of local ownership, the limited number of preferable positions available to locally-living people, and the disproportionate power of the lodges. Another way in which locally-living people use words to challenge ‘the official story of ecotourism in Tortuguero’ is through storytelling. As mentioned in this paper, some locally-living people use gossip to highlight perceived imbalances in local balances of power (e.g. lodge power vs. village power). Other respondents tell nostalgic tales of life in the village before tourism and/or conservation. Scott also considers both gossip and folklore as forms of everyday resistance (1985).

**Inappropriate ‘frontstage’ behavior as resistance**

The aesthetic demands of ecotourism (and most tourism in general) are sensitive to unwanted components- things, behaviors and actions that are not expected to be part of the destination landscape (e.g. litter in a ‘pristine’ conservation area). As such, overt resistance could easily interfere with the ‘tourist gaze’ (Urry 2002), creating the potential for negative word of mouth and/or lower visitation rates, and adversely affecting local livelihoods, in addition to any potential management-related conflicts that may arise
(see Chapter 2, this thesis). Resistance, therefore, must largely remain in the ‘backstage’ of most tourist destinations if they are to remain attractive to tourists.

Tourism demands a certain level of public decorum and certain types of behavior from its ‘host’ community, especially from those that work directly with tourists. Its demands, constraints, and its required aesthetics (of places and peoples) are often common knowledge among those living and/or working in a tourist destination, attraction, or facility (e.g. a cruise ship) (Mowforth and Munt 1998; Edensor 2001; Weaver 2005). In Tortuguero, local people know what ecotourists want, how they expect the environment to look, and which roles tourists expect them to play. As such, behavior that contradicts the ‘unwritten rules’, as well as the laws, regulations, policies and other institutional practices that govern tourism in the village, can be interpreted as resistance to (at least some aspects of) tourism. This paper documents examples of observed instances of tourism-inappropriate behavior or rule breaking that could compromise the ecotourism image of Tortuguero and associated future visits/sales. As previously mentioned, during peak times of the solid waste crisis (observed in 2002-2004) people buried or burned trash in plain view of tourists. While some efforts to deal with garbage accumulation were clearly coping behaviors (people just trying to deal with their own solid waste), other actions seemed designed to draw attention (e.g. that of tourists and lodge management) to local waste management issues. For example,
locally-living people would let trash pile up in the receptacles in public areas (e.g. in overflowing trash cans; in big piles of bags) despite knowing that collection services had broken down. Some people also burned waste in ‘tourist hotspots’ such as the areas near the main lodge traffic dock where tourists arrive, depart, and wait for boat transportation to lodges. Such actions can therefore easily be interpreted as designed (intended) to disturb the tourist gaze.

Similarly, boat captains for the lodges sometimes play ‘chicken’ with each other, racing boats against one another, violating the near-village lagoon ‘no wake zone’, creating a spectacle in front of tourists that does not fit well with idyllic marketing images of Tortuguero, and causes potential equipment-related and safety-related concerns. Certain individuals living in the village were also observed saying rude things to or making lewd suggestions to tourists, challenging their know role in the ecotourism scenario. Although very infrequent, crime that specifically targeted tourist rooms and ‘beach boy’\textsuperscript{19} type behavior also occurred in Tortuguero (2002-2004). All such behaviors can also be considered forms of everyday resistance to the local ecotourism industry or components of it since they are all unorganized, individual

\textsuperscript{19} North American/European women who vacation in developing country destinations sometimes have sexual relationships with certain local males, who are typically young and in good shape, and who are commonly referred to in the literature that addresses this topic, as beach boys. The female tourists in such relationships are seen as holding the economic power, but beach boys extract economic gain and other benefits from these romantic/sexual relationships (Herold, Garcia, and DeMoya 2001)
willful transgressions, rather than organized group resistance efforts (Scott 1985) of the acceptable ‘frontstage’ (MacCannell 1973) ecotourism behavior for Tortuguero. Thinking about resistance in Tortuguero with respect to the (eco)tourist gaze and the village’s dependency on a desirable ecotourism clarifies why burning garbage in plain view of Tortuguero tourists can be considered a strong, overt display of resistance. Such an act is not a subtle form of everyday resistance but rather a blatant violation of the unwritten yet understood code of ecotourism aesthetics in the village- it screams for tourists (and those whose income/profits depend on tourists) to take note of environmental problems in the village (the solid waste crisis).

**Using work as a site for resistance in Tortuguero**

Resistance can also occur in the workplace, with members of the economically subordinate class using labor as a means of protest and the workplace as a site for resistance (Scott 1985; Ong 1987; Wolford 2004). Aiwa Ong, for instance, has written about female Malaysian factory workers using spirit possession as a form of resistance to their new roles in capitalistic factory-based production. In another example, Wendy Wolford writes about members of The Movement of Landless Rural Workers (MST) in Brazil using squatting and mobility resistance against changes that led to what are perceived as unfair agricultural land tenure regulations and agricultural working conditions. She illustrates how plantation squatters used mobility and exit as a means of
“expressing discontent with a plantation” and as a way for workers to express a “sense of autonomy and freedom” (Wolford 2004: 417).

Some work-related behaviors observed in Tortuguero can be interpreted as resistance against the working conditions within and/or the limited opportunities of the local tourism industry. Tortuguero’s tourism industry consists of a highly mobile workforce, with people moving from job to job and employer to employer frequently throughout a season and over the years. Sometimes, the changes in employment are due to seasonal demand issues but in some cases, employees appear to be testing hiring practices, punctuality policies and employee-related rules at lodges and other businesses. Several employees also revealed purposefully creating difficult situations for their employers by spontaneously quitting their jobs by simply not showing to work one day, without any prior communication with their managers or other bosses. People also undertook work-to-rule type behaviors such as frequently showing up late, taking extended breaks, and violating work-related dress codes. Several people emphasized the ‘disposable’ or easily replaceable nature of their jobs given the prevalence of the industry and extreme need for labor at local lodges, etc. during high season (e.g. R62 and R63). Such respondents seemed confident that they could find a new job rather easily. It therefore seems as though some tourism workers in Tortuguero exert the (little) power they do have through switching jobs, and leaving a lodge shorthanded or
taking unexpected leave. These workers use ‘exiting’ as a means of re-asserting their freedom and escaping working conditions viewed as unfair, in ways similar to those described in Wolford’s work on the MST (Wolford 2004). These actions are perceived as effective ways of reminding employers that workers do indeed have some power, after all, despite the lower employment echelons that they may occupy in the local ecotourism economy. These acts of resistance draw attention to the types of tourism work available to local people (mostly menial), and these behaviors also challenge the idea that labor class (subordinate) in Tortuguero is composed of ‘happy hosts’, as ‘the official story’ of their conversion to ecotourism suggests.

In some cases, however, work-related resistance can work against resisters seeking to ‘improve their lot in life’ or change the social order (e.g. employment hierarchies). Paul E. Willis’s ethnography of the ‘male white working class counter-school culture’, for example, revealed that rebellion against the school system by working class boys ended up ensuring that they would end up with lower level jobs. Their acting out and the social responses to it served to reinforce the existing social order (they were seen as troubled kids headed for limited job opportunities) rather than challenging the social order that they were protesting by acting out. He argues that their own culture prepares them for a working class future and that their damnation of the school system is all at one “true learning, affirmation, appropriation, and as a form of
resistance” (Willis 1977: 3). This argument is also useful in contemplating work-related resistance in Tortuguero. As previously mentioned, some locally-living people ‘test the rules’ of the local ecotourism system by not showing up to work, or using other ‘hiding tactics’ such as a taking long breaks or showing up late, in order to their frustrations with the type of work they do in the ecotourism industry. At the same time, locally-living people complain about the lack of local access to more desirable ecotourism-related positions (e.g. managements; top guides positions) and the practice of lodges and other businesses importing workers from other areas (e.g. the Central Valley; Nicaragua) rather than using local workers. Ironically, local business owners and lodge management claim that they are often forced to import workers. Numerous business owners, including those running small businesses in the village, perceive many of the locally-living workers as less reliable since they have been known to show up late or not show up at all, for example. In Tortuguero therefore, the potential exists for labor-related resistance to be self-defeating for those who resist, as Willis (1977) suggests, perpetually relegating locally-living people who behave in such ways to the very set of limited of opportunities that frustrates them, or worse.

**Resisting the mantra ‘a turtle is worth more alive than dead’**

During Meletis’s fieldwork, locally-living people made statements and undertook actions both in the backstage and the frontstage of the village, which pose
serious challenges to the ‘a turtle is worth more alive than dead’ public transcript. Such statements and actions suggest that while some locally-living people might have wholeheartedly adopted the mantra ‘a turtle is worth more alive than dead’ as their own, others have rejected the mantra or adopted their own unique versions of it, which for instance, might accommodate both turtle conservation and turtle consumption. ‘A turtle is worth more alive than dead’ represents the anti-extractive values associated with the national park system in Costa Rica, and its US-influenced origins. Poaching can therefore be interpreted as resistance against such non-extractive values. Much has been written about poaching as resistance, for example, especially in the context of the establishment of parks and protected areas and local loss of access to resources (examples include: Young 2001; Jacoby 2001; Glaesel 2000; Alexander and McGregor 2000). Poaching can therefore be interpreted as a rejection of the local resource use restrictions including the criminalization of the consumptive use of turtle meat and eggs that have imposed through conservation-related legislation (e.g. the establishment of the parks, and individual laws forbidding extractive resource use). The park system and such restrictions are intimately linked to ecotourism development in Costa Rica.

Locally-living people have also created their own interpretations of conservation and local resource use as represented in the mantra ‘a turtle is worth more alive than dead’; they have adopted unique interpretations of the values and ways of thinking
behind the mantra in ways that are not captured in ‘the official story of ecotourism in Tortuguero’. Firstly, a locally-living person’s adoption of the mantra and the values attached to might be genuine or might be disingenuous; they might say one thing and do another in the ‘backstage’ of Tortuguero. For example, someone might repeat the mantra to please tourists but then admit to friends that they don’t actually believe in it. Secondly, some locally-living people have adopted the mantra in more complex ways than is typically acknowledged, mixing it with other beliefs or adopting a different interpretation of it. For instance, in the example provided earlier about the family that benefits from turtle-tourism in a variety of ways, but still serves (illegal) turtle eggs to its special guests, the family seems to accept turtle tourism and benefit from the fact that indeed ‘a turtle is worth more alive than dead’, while at the same time enjoying presenting turtle eggs to honored guests. The same can be said about locally-living people who are ‘pro-turtle conservation’ but also believe that some turtle consumption should be allowed, if people want it (e.g. those who believe that locally-living people should be allowed to eat jaguar predated turtle carcasses that are still viable for consumption). This could be considered as belonging to an emerging set of made-in-Tortuguero ‘conservation counter-narratives’ (Campbell 2002b, 2002a) through which locally-living people are creating their own adapted set of beliefs and resisting those being imposed on them. Lastly, according to Scott’s conceptualization of ‘everyday
resistance’ (Scott 1985), the fact that locally-living people literally repeat the mantra (e.g. on a turtle tour or in an interview) or behave in accordance with it can also in be interpreted as feigned compliance- a form of resistance in which people appear to be ‘towing the line’ with respect to a certain policy or system while actually not agreeing with it (Scott 1985). This ‘feigned compliance’ leaves room for the alternative conceptualizations of ecotourism and conservation that seem to be emerging in Tortuguero.

**Implications of ‘the alternative story of ecotourism in Tortuguero’**

In terms of the contradictions and divergences between ‘the official story of ecotourism in Tortuguero’ and the ‘alternative story’ presented here, we need not be overly pessimistic about ecotourism in Tortuguero. As this paper has illustrated, locally-living people are invested in ecotourism (their livelihoods depend on it) and have gained a great appreciation of it, regardless of whatever changes they would like to see. On the other hand, it might not be the most effective strategy to keep upholding Tortuguero as a model of success for ecotourism by focusing on ‘the official story’ of revenue generation and turtle population resurgence, while ignoring local needs and concerns. Examining local resistance reveals opportunities for learning from the mistakes and shortcomings of the past, and improving the situation.
This data presented here also identify the task of recognizing and responding to local perceptions of the industry status quo as a key pillar for future ecotourism success. For instance, the ‘alternative version of the story’ reveals that lodge-village relations and park-village relations are perceived as critical to the success of ecotourism and currently viewed as being strained (both by local respondents and park staff). This suggests that more attention, funding and effort be directed towards improving these relationships in the interest of both conservation and tourism. Contrary to Lee and Snepenger’s (1992) claim about the local people in Tortuguero being more concerned with tourism-related revenue generation than their environment, this paper reveals that this does not seem to be the case, if it ever was. In terms of park-community relations and impact management shortcomings, respondents highlighted the village’s role as a ‘gateway community’ (Healy 2007) for the park (they see the park as dependent on the community AND vice versa) and called for improved park-community relations because of this key interdependency. Therefore, the shared concerns about the future of ecotourism in Tortuguero, as revealed through local resistance, represent fertile ground upon which the community and other related actors can come together to undertake some of the solutions put forth by respondents, such as creating an official tourism management plan. This collaboration would also encourage ecotourism-related
participation and empowerment that has been seen by some as lacking in Tortuguero (Place 1991), but necessary for long-term success (Scheyvens 1999).

The interview data and local acts of resistance presented in this paper also reveal a previously undisclosed local hierarchy of concerns (e.g. environmental problems; cost/benefit distribution concerns). This hierarchy not only exists, but resistance suggests that it should be made central to future tourism planning in the area. Above all, as seen through their words and deeds, the residents of Tortuguero are aware of both the costs and benefits associated with their version of ecotourism. As this paper illustrates, they are also aware that the village alone lacks the economic, technical, political and social capital to improve the current state of affairs (see also Chapter 4, this thesis). Through their statements and actions, local respondents are pleading for assistance (to the lodges, to the CCC, to the park, the MINAE and to various branches of the government) to help improve the situation in Tortuguero. They are also proposing solutions, such as a capping tourist numbers and a ordering a (re)direction of MINAE and ICT focus towards organizing efforts and funding for impact mitigation, and suggesting that this must be done soon. Local resistance should therefore be conceived of as part of an ever-evolving conservation (and ecotourism-related) ‘identity-in-the-making’ (Sundberg 2004) and the emergence of a new ‘made-in-Tortuguero’ conception of what local ecotourism and conservation should look like.
Lessons from the alternative version of the story

Acts and statements of local resistance also disclose which key actors are viewed as doing their jobs and which are not, targeting locally-identified ‘weakspots’ such as the Park (MINAE), the municipality, the ICT, and the lodges. Respondents call on all of these actors to help deal with environmental problems ‘before it is too late’. Locally-living respondents also emphasize the ecotourism-related relationships that must be improved, from their standpoints, such as the relationship between locally-living people and the park staff, the relationship between lodge owners and management, and village residents, and between the village and the regional municipality, suggesting that mediation or another bridge-building activity/process might be a worthwhile undertaking.

The ‘alternative story’ also exposes the existence of self-blame in the community—how locally-living people also blame themselves for some of the ecotourism-associated problems, such as the solid waste crisis (2003; 2004) (see Chapter 4, this thesis). Despite some feelings of powerlessness, respondents also view themselves as part of ‘solving’ such problems. This, combined with loud grumbling about the token nature of participation in decision-making in Tortuguero, identifies a need for more genuine participation as well, including venues/timing/formats that better suit local needs and that will encourage local participation.
Viewing nonparticipation as a form of resistance creates an opportunity for re-examining what may have been perceived as local disinterest, ignorance or apathy in the past. It allows us to ask: Are people really uninterested in the issue at hand, or are they using non-participation as a form of resistance against something, such as the actor hosting the event or the project being discussed? Re-framing non-participation as an active choice or form of resistance highlights the fact that non-participation might have nothing to do with a lack of interest, but more to do with perceptions of the process or something larger. Such possibilities should be taken into account in soliciting participation. Furthermore, respondents reveal that although resistance does exist in Tortuguero, there are still many people who are interested in improving tourism, life in the village, and the condition of the environment and that they hold unique knowledge, experience and skills to contribute to the issues at hand.

If a ‘happy host’ environment is to be maintained, locally-living people must truly feel as though they have a voice, that it is being heard, and that what it is saying is being valued and taken seriously. Listening to them is an important first step that many respondents currently feel is lacking. Participation-related results suggest that it is time to create a new venue that makes such honest interchanges between locally-living people and actors such as MINAE, the CCC and the ICT not only possible, but attractive to locally-living people. Collecting data on perceived shortcomings, common concerns
and shared proposed solutions can, as demonstrated in this paper, provide useful material for working towards building local unity and using local agreement as a foundation for much-needed collaboration on certain issues such as improved solid waste management.

**Resistance as negotiation rather than complete rejection**

While resistance is a form of protest against existing conditions and consequences of these, it can also be seen as a way to (re)negotiate the status quo or as a way to mitigate or deny claims made by superordinate classes, as Scott would say (1985). As exhibited by the statements (e.g. critiques of key actors’ contributions to environmental management) and the actions (e.g. using labor as resistance in the ecotourism industry) showcased in this paper, resistance challenges the ‘way things are’, as well as claims made in ‘the official story’ and proposes alternatives in moving forward. Resistance in Tortuguero, therefore, is not typically a call for the rejection of ecotourism in its entirety. Rather, it is directed at certain components of the industry such as working conditions or the lack of environmental management. This local resistance, therefore, does not represent a call for the end of ecotourism or conservation, or a lack of local support for such endeavors, it rather suggests that locally-living people are constantly attempting to (re)negotiate the rules of engagement in both ecotourism
and conservation, as the section about a turtle ‘being worth more alive than dead’ illustrates.

Most respondents agree that ecotourism has brought an easier way of life to the village, including greater amounts of disposable income and community benefits such as the introduction of potable water and a twice-weekly health clinic. They are also proud of their local environment and its ability to draw tourists from around the world. There is great local esteem for sea turtles, both as a tourist draw and as a part of local culture and history. Many locally-living people also appreciate the less tangible benefits of ecotourism such as the opportunities it creates for international exchange as well. Most residents of Tortuguero are acutely aware of the great amount of revenue that ecotourism generates for the village, the park, the CCC, and Costa Rica in general. Their resistance, however, reveals some of the shortcomings of ecotourism as development as it has occurred to date. Most respondents object to (at least certain elements of) the current state-of-the-environment and the lack of attention it is receiving from those that should be caring for it, including them. They reject overly romanticized portrayals of the community and their environment, by emphasizing the array of local conflicts, political camps and insider/outsider divides that exist locally. Respondents also resist the current distribution of costs and benefits through grumbling about what is not fair about ecotourism in Tortuguero (e.g. it is not fair the lodges reap most of the profits
while contributing little to impact management in the village) (see Chapter 4, this thesis), and draw attention to perennial tourism-related problems such as revenue leakage and poor cooperation between key actors.

**Questions raised by resistance**

Contemplating resistance in Tortuguero raises interesting questions about present and future life in the village, with respect to ecotourism. Is there an emerging new local consciousness as the alternative response to the mantra ‘a turtle being is worth more alive than dead’ suggests? If so, is this the result of lived experience in an aging ecotourism site- are locally-living people growing tired of living ecotourism lives under the rules of ‘others’ (e.g. MINAE; ICT; JAPDEVA; CCC; the lodges)? Or, have they somehow come to the conclusion that it might be possible to both conserve and consume sea turtles, after all? Many locally-living people are aware that the green turtle population that nests in Tortuguero, once facing a tremendous decline as the results of commercial turtle efforts, is now exhibiting a healthy recovery (Troëng and Rankin 2005).
Resistance in Tortuguero has specific implications for different actors and interests. For example, it has implications for the CCC, since they run a local conservation program dependent on local cooperation and partially dependent on tourism-generated revenue. If resistance grows or specifically targets their operations, they might have difficulties fulfilling their mandate. It also has implications for MINAE, the park system, and the local park staff, all of whom are intimately tied to local cooperation and to the continued ‘success’ of ecotourism in Tortuguero. Resistance also threatens the livelihoods of many workers and the capacity for local revenue generation for all actors dependent on tourism for survival (virtually the whole village). For these reasons, local resistance including everyday resistance must be taken seriously.

**Conclusion**

The local voices and actions observed in Tortuguero and interpreted as resistance in this paper offer a strong argument for looking ‘backstage’ as part of undertaking tourism ‘evaluations’ and case-studies; this type of data is not typically presented and yet offers key insight into ecotourism in practice and community member responses to it. Tourism scholarship has been criticized as being ‘being light on theory’. It is our hope that this paper offers an example of how to include theoretical explorations in case studies. In this case, introducing resistance-related theory added a layer of depth to understanding our analysis of respondent statements and actions. As we have argued in
the previous section, interpreting some of the data as examples of resistance helped us to not only present ‘an alternative version of ecotourism in Tortuguero’ but also to suggest innovative ways forward for ecotourism in Tortuguero, highlighting local priorities that surfaced in analysis. In conclusion, we believe that affording greater consideration to resistance as part of the ‘lived experience’ of tourism-based communities is an important part of heeding the call for more in-depth studies of resident attitudes toward tourism impacts (Kuvan and Akan 2005), developing a better understanding of ecotourism in practice, and aiming to improve ecotourism scholarship, planning and management in general. We are also grateful to resistance scholars such as those cited in this paper for providing us the interesting material with which to contemplate resistance as it relates to (eco)tourism development.
Chapter 4: Benevolent and benign? Using environmental justice to investigate waste-related impacts of ecotourism in destination communities
“The environmental justice movement challenges toxic colonialism, environmental racism, and the international toxics trade at home and abroad” (Bullard no date, 17).

“Consumption and production patterns, especially in nations with wasteful ‘throw-away’ lifestyles like the United States, and the interests of transnational corporations create and maintain unequal and unjust waste burdens within and between affluent and poor communities, states, and regions of the world” (Bullard and Johnson 2000, 572).

**Introduction**

Environmental Justice (EJ) is concerned with “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies” (Bullard and Johnson 2000, 558). EJ is also about “the right of all people to share equally in the benefits bestowed by a healthy environment” (Adamson, Evans, and Stein 2002, 4), that is where people: “live, work, play, and worship” (ibid). Environmental Justice (EJ) is both a social movement and an area of academic exploration. It arose in the USA, and has traditionally been associated with predominantly Black community struggles to prevent the siting of locally unwanted land uses (LULUs). Conventional LULUs include hazardous waste facilities, nuclear facilities, heavy industry plants, noxious manufacturing sites, and other types of waste disposal sites (e.g. landfills). In general, EJ conflicts are community battles for cleaner, healthier environments for those bearing the impacts of a nearby industry or facility.
Increasingly, scholars are applying EJ theory to an expanding set of environmental conflicts in a growing array of places (Walker and Bulkeley 2006). EJ has also become international, and has been taken up by groups and communities around the world to frame their struggles in both urban and rural settings in the Global North and South. At the same time as this internationalization of EJ has been occurring, EJ has been applied to global environmental issues. Authors and activists have expanded the concept of ‘environmental injustices’ to go beyond race-related injustices, and to consider different types of marginalized communities around the world. As Alston and Brown conclude: “If we examine environmental issues internationally, the same domestic pattern of disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards and degradation exists worldwide among those who are nonwhite, poor, less educated, and politically less powerful” (1993, 179).

Despite the expansion of EJ, some industries and their impacts remain largely absent from the literature. Service industries in general are underrepresented. In this paper, we contribute to the expansion and diversification of EJ by using it to frame an ecotourism-related solid waste crisis in Tortuguero, Costa Rica, a renowned ecotourism destination, and a novel EJ context. We propose five characteristics that define many communities struggling with more conventional EJ conflicts, and then illustrate the similarities between these types of communities and isolated ecotourism-based
communities in the Global South. We then apply the five characteristics to frame the solid waste crisis in Tortuguero and discuss both the utility and the shortcomings of the frame.

In applying EJ to the case of ecotourism in Tortuguero, Costa Rica, we hope to accomplish several things. First, we hope to show that, despite largely being absent from the environmental justice literature, service industries such as the tourism and hospitality have the capacity to create environmental injustices that disproportionately impact certain types of communities. Second, we use the EJ frame to highlight the roles that geographical location and socio-economic, technical, and political marginality often play in siting ecotourism development and in complicating related environmental impact management. Third, in contemplating both the utility and the shortcomings of EJ as a frame for examining undesirable impacts in ecotourism-based communities of the Global South, we hope to provide an example of the opportunities that exist for introducing concepts and theory from other disciplines into the study of tourism.

This research uses a case study of Tortuguero, Costa Rica, where the authors have been studying ecotourism since 1999. While we cite a number of previous studies conducted in Tortuguero, we draw primarily on recent research conducted by Meletis during two field seasons (2003; 2004) when she spent a total of 7 months in the village. During that time, she lived in locally-owned accommodations and interacted daily with
locally-living people, tourists, and others. It is based on her experiences and observations during this time that we describe a waste crisis (2002-2004). Waste disposal problems and impacts were visible on the landscape at the beach, in the village, in the lagoon, at the ‘recycling plant’. In addition to her own research, Meletis also witnessed components of a waste audit (Camacho 2003) conducted at the recycling plant, and participated in several joint interviews about the waste crisis with the auditor (Camacho) in 2003. Data collection included over 70 interviews with people in Tortuguero and 1001 surveys of tourists visiting the area. Research methods, data analysis, and results can be found in Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis, but support arguments made here. For example, in Chapter 3, we report results of interviews with locally-living people to describe attitudes towards ecotourism, including concerns over its environmental impacts.

**Environmental Justice**

**Roots and key concepts**

Originating as an extension of the Civil Rights Movement in United States (US), Environmental Justice (EJ) is now an international movement and a varied body of academic literature (Bullard and Johnson 1999). EJ activists draw attention to, struggle to prevent, and fight for assistance in dealing with, the impacts of a disproportionate amount of noxious facilities or LULUs in predominantly minority neighborhoods and
other marginalized communities (Adamson, Evans, and Stein 2002). Academics
document environmental injustices, help to expose the superstructures that produce
them, and hypothesize about preventing them. Important definitions associated with
Environmental Justice include:

**Environmental Racism**, a term used to describe “any policy, practice or directive
that differentially affects or disadvantages (whether intended or unintended)
individuals, groups or communities based on race or color” (Bullard 1993, 98). Environmental racism, combined with public policy, provides benefits to whites
(or other powerful groups) while shifting industry costs to people of color (or
other marginalized groups) (ibid).

**Distributive Justice**, a term referring to the distribution of costs and benefits of a
particular development or situation, and the relationship of this distribution to
class barriers and racism. This term is used in association with the following

**Procedural justice**, a term describing the goal of ensuring fair *practices and
procedures* with respect the presence of environmental toxins and/or exposure to
unsound environments, in order to prevent ‘undue burdens’ on minority
communities and other marginalized groups (Bullard 1993).

Procedural equity should help to ensure *geographic or distributive equity*: the
‘equitable placement’ of environmental hazards or other undesirables across all
different types of communities so that minority groups have the *same changes of
being exposed* to these as anyone else (Bullard 1990, 1993; Floyd and Johnson
2002).

**Environmental Equity**, a term used to describe the ultimate goal of the EJ
movement: an equitable distribution of environmental costs and benefits, across
boundaries of race and class (Bullard 1990, 1993; Floyd and Johnson 2002).
Waste-related conflicts & environmental justice

The siting of waste facilities is familiar to the EJ movement and literature. Waste has been a topic of concern since before the seminal report *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States* (Commission for Racial Justice, United Church of Christ, 1987). The case known as *Bean vs. SouthWestern Waste Management* in 1979, for example, brought the first charge of discrimination in a hazardous waste facility siting under civil rights law (Bullard no date). Furthermore, analyzing the spatial distributions of solid waste disposal sites in the US in the 1970s suggested that race (e.g. beyond any class-related considerations) determined where such sites were being placed (Bullard 1993). Such work was accompanied by the ‘flashpoint of the movement’, the mobilization of large numbers of Blacks against the planned siting of a PCB contaminated landfill site in a poor Black neighborhood in Warren County, NC, in 1982 (Floyd and Johnson 2002). The study prompted by the Warren County protests revealed that ¾ of commercial hazardous waste landfills in eight states in the South were in predominantly African-American neighborhoods (U.S. General Accounting Office 1983; Bullard none given). Many such cases and responses have since followed. Robert Bullard’s *Dumping in Dixie*.

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1 Another critical juncture in the early days of the EJ movement was the publication of the 1987 report by the Commission for Racial Justice, entitled *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States*, which singled out race from class, as the “most potent variable” in the siting of toxic facilities (Bullard and Johnson 2000, 557).
*Race, Class and Environmental Quality* (1994) outlines fundamental concepts in environmental justice, and describes case studies of notorious EJ conflicts.

Another important piece of EJ history is U.S. executive order 12898 (1994), entitled “Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations” which federally mandates procedures for addressing EJ issues (Simpson 2002). This was accompanied by the creation of a federal Environmental Justice office to oversee the undertaking of such actions (Bullard and Johnson 2000). In 1991, another event of paramount importance in EJ’s history took place: the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in Washington D.C. (Bullard none given). It included over 300 community leaders from the U.S., Canada, Central and South America, and the Marshall Islands (Adamson, Evans and Stein 2002). EJ in the US now includes many diverse groups and centers, such as Citizens Against Toxic Exposure, St. James Citizens, and the Southwest Centre for Economic and Environmental Justice (Adamson, Evans, and Stein 2002; Bullard, Johnson, and Wright 1997). In spite of these accomplishments in the US, waste-related injustices and their relationships with minority neighborhoods remain a (now international) EJ topic of concern.
The expansion of EJ

While waste issues have always been central to EJ, EJ is now used to address: mining (Halder 2003), nuclear contamination (Kuletz 2002), oil production (Comfort 2002), pesticide exposure (Peisch no date), access to environmental goods (Walker and Bulkeley 2006), income inequalities, housing inequalities, homelessness, access to services, transportation issues, the redevelopment of brownfields, occupational health and safety issues, the ‘downside’ of sustainable development, and the provision of basic human rights (Goldman 1996 and Hofrichter 1993, cited in Floyd and Johnson 2002, 61). New alliances have been formed between EJ groups and mainstream environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club (Longo 1998, cited in Floyd and Johnson 2002). EJ has become far more international; it is now applied to many different contexts (urban; rural; Global North; Global South), and the literature includes case studies from rural areas (Getches and Pellow 2002), places like Canada (Fletcher 2003; Haalboom et al. 2006), Puerto Rico (Peisch no date), New Zealand (Pearce, Kingsham, and Zawar-Reza 2006), the Pacific Islands (Kuletz 2002), Nigeria (Comfort 2002), South Africa (McDonald 2002), and indigenous communities from around the world (Halder 2003; Bullard 1993; Getches and Pellow 2002; Bullard none given).

At the same time as this internationalization of EJ applications has been occurring, the EJ movement has also picked up on global environmental issues as uniting
themes (Bullard 1993; Agyeman, Bullard, and Evans 2003). Examples of shared global concerns are: patterns of industrial accidents around the world; international food security, equitable global climate change preparedness among the world’s nations, the environmental costs of war, North-South differentials regarding exposure to toxins, and the global citizen’s right to a clean and healthy environment (Alston and Brown 1993; Adeola 2000; Walker and Bulkeley 2006). Furthermore, EJ discourse and framings have gained such prominence that EJ has influenced international policy on global environmental rights (Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs 2004; Belkhir and Adeola 1997).

The (often illegal) international waste trade is an important EJ topic at both local and global scales (Belkhir and Adeola 1997). In 1991, the Global North’s practice of using the Global South as a ‘dumping ground’ gained attention after a publicly leaked memo from then chief World Bank economist Lawrence Summers suggested encouraging more waste trade to the Global South (Greenpeace 1992 cited in Bullard and Johnson 2000). Due to such practices, EJ framings of waste-related issues have also moved into international contexts. Recent applications include a combined political ecology and environmental justice framing of plastic-bag related waste in Nairobi (Njeru 2006) and an environmental justice perspective on the importation of foreign hazardous wastes into China (Wu and Wang 2002).
Tourism in the environmental justice literature: inadequate coverage

Despite the expansion of EJ, some industries and their impacts remain largely absent from the literature. Service industries in general and tourism specifically, are underrepresented both in terms of EJ struggles on the ground, and coverage in the literature. While EJ as represented in a distinct body of literature described above has seldom been applied to tourism, justice issues are associated with tourism and have received attention, even if they are not explicitly labeled as such. For example, justice and the politics of international tourism development, especially in the Global South, have been scholarly topics of interest since at least the 1970s (Hall 1994; Mowforth and Munt 1998). Many scholars have emphasized the various imbalances in international tourism development, such as the demographic and standard-of-living differences between many ‘hosts’ and ‘guests’ (e.g. Torres and Skillicorn 2004), and the links between tourism and colonialism (Mowforth and Munt 1998; Hall 1994). Environmental issues associated with tourism have also received attention, and there exists an extensive literature on the negative environmental impacts of tourism stretching back to at least the 1970s (e.g. Cohen 1978; Lindberg, Enriquez, and Sproule 1996; Weaver 1999). This literature includes tourism-generated solid waste problems experienced in small island tourism destinations (Kirby 2004; Gregory 1999) and parks and protected areas (e.g. Stern et al. 2003; Kuo and Yu 2001). Again, sometimes justices issues associated with
environmental impacts are recognized, even though they are not framed using EJ. For example, there are striking justice issues associated with tourism to parks and protected areas and a substantial ‘parks and people literature’ that includes coverage of conflicts surrounding justice-related claims and local responses of resistance vis-à-vis the establishment and management of parks and protected areas. The focus is typically on dislocation of peoples from park-appropriated lands, restrictions imposed on local behaviors and access to resources and the resulting impacts, and local responses to these impositions (Charnley 2005; Geisler 2003; West et al. 2003; Akama 1996; Sindiga 1995; Carrier and Macleod 2005). The creation of a park or protected area on what was once locally-accessible land, can be seen ‘outsiders’ using conservation (and ecotourism) to rationalize the privatization of land, the restriction of local access to resources, and the dislocation of local people from it (Johnston 2003, 123).

The explicit use of EJ to characterize undesirable tourism-related environmental impacts and associated costs are limited (Floyd and Johnson 2002). When EJ has been applied in tourism, the focus is typically on (marginalized) community members’ access to recreational resources such as national parks and beaches (Floyd and Johnson 2002, citing Aldy et al. 1999 and Tarrant and Cordell 1999; Garcia 2002). Exceptions include studies about populations relocated for the creation of parks (e.g. Martin 1997 cited in Porter and Tarrant 2001), studies that explore minority groups’ exposure to
contaminated fish through recreational fishing (e.g. Toth and Brown 1997, West et al 1992, and Burger et al 1999, and West 1992, all cited in Floyd and Johnson 2002), and a study that considered the negative tourism-related impacts on low-income, blue collar neighborhoods with federal tourism sites nearby (Porter and Tarrant 2001). The selective re-construction, gentrification and potential ‘Disneyfication’ of the French Quarter in New Orleans with affluent tourists in mind is also being framed using EJ (e.g. Smith 2006).

We recently discovered an application of EJ to ecotourism: the chapter “Ecotourism, Park Systems, and Environmental Justice in Latin America” by Zebich-Knos (Zebich-Knos in press). Zebich-Knos uses EJ to contemplate whether “ecotourism businesses and national protected areas make good neighbors for local residents” (Zebich-Knos in press: 280), using case studies: Mexico’s Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve, Belize’s Jeanette Kawas National Park, and Panama’s Kuna Reserve project. She claims that environmental justice often “takes a back seat” in top-down parks policymaking (Zebich-Knos in press, 281). The chapter focuses mainly on the uneven distribution of ecotourism revenues and limits to local participation in decision-making processes, however, rather than on inequities associated with ecotourism’s negative environmental impacts.
The utility of EJ as a lens for looking at ecotourism

The application of EJ to ecotourism is to a certain extent counter-intuitive. Unlike traditional industries profiled in the environmental justice literature (e.g. dirty; heavy industrial; noxious), ecotourism is a service industry and a popular form of ‘green’ development. Ecotourism, in theory, should provide alternative livelihoods for communities without compromising the environment (Ceballos-Lascuráin 1996; Honey 1999; Boo 1990). Even its most basic definitions suggest that ecotourism should provide a healthy living environment for local residents (and not just for tourists), which would have it meeting expanded environmental justice goals (Walker and Bulkeley 2006). More recently, ecotourism has been redefined as including socio-political goals for ‘host communities’ (especially indigenous communities, when relevant) such as community empowerment and increased participation in related decision-making (Scheyvens 1999; McDonald and Wearing 2003; Scheyvens 2002; The International Ecotourism Society no date). In theory then, ecotourism should prevent environmental injustices through better planning/design, pro-active management, and intimate local involvement in decision-making.

In spite of the seeming mismatch between ecotourism and EJ, we suggest that communities experiencing ecotourism, particularly in the Global South, have at least five
characteristics in common with communities facing LULUs dealt with traditionally in
the EJ literature:

i. The siting of the land use/industry/facility is strategic; communities and places
are chosen for specific geographic, political, and economic reasons;

ii. The brunt of the associated undesirable environmental impacts is borne by the
community that hosts the land use/industry/facility, and the community often
gets little to no assistance from impact-causing parties (barring what is required
by law) to address the impacts. Conversely, investors and business owners,
typically from outside of the community, tend to benefit most from the land
use/industry/facility;

iii. The impacts of the land use/facility/industry (and oftentimes the entire
enterprise or components of it) are imported without well-defined community
consent;

iv. The local discourse (i.e. they way in which locally-living people talk about
the problems) often labels the land use/facility/industry and its associated
impacts as an unfair and unjust situation, framed using ‘us vs. them’ language;
and

v. Affected communities often face political, economic, and social challenges to
demanding compensation, reparations, or assistance vis-à-vis the siting of the
land use/facility/industry and its impacts.

To support our argument, we apply an EJ frame and these five characteristics to
our case study in Tortuguero, Costa Rica. We describe how these five characteristics
feature in traditional EJ cases, how they are relevant to ecotourism in general, and how
they play out in our case study.
Case Study: Tortuguero, Costa Rica

The village of Tortuguero

Tortuguero is a small village on the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica, close to Costa Rica’s northern border with Nicaragua, located less than 15 degrees north of the equator. Tortuguero’s climate is hot and wet, with an average daily temperature is 26 degrees C (79 F) and the annual average rainfall is over 5,000 mm (200+ inches) (Caribbean Conservation Corporation 2003). The village is located on a small strip of land between the Caribbean Sea (Atlantic) and an intricate lagoon and canal system (Fig. 4.4); it also relies on groundwater that lies close below the surface (Caribbean Conservation Corporation 2003). The village is now home to over 850 people (Jarquin and Gayle 2004) but until the 1990s, the population was under 200 people (Place 1991). It was settled in the 1920s/1930s by Afro-Caribbean immigrants from San Andreas (Colombia), Bluefields (Nicaragua), and other surrounding areas. In addition to Nicaraguans and Colombians who continue to settle in Tortuguero, people now immigrate from Northern countries (e.g. Canada, The United States, The Netherlands) and from other areas of Costa Rica (e.g. The Central Valley).
Figure 4.4: Tortuguero’s remote location, its wet environment, and the restricted space available on the land finger that it inhabits. This represents a ‘fragile’ and limited/limiting environment for waste management.

Tortuguero beach is the largest rookery for green turtles in the Caribbean (three other species of sea turtles also nest there) (Caribbean Conservation Corporation 2003). In the 1950s herpetologist Archie Carr began working with the sea turtles in the area, and his work eventually led to the formation of The Caribbean Conservation Corporation, a US-based turtle conservation NGO with a field station and turtle monitoring program in Tortuguero. Turtle harvesting was once an important part of the economy and culture in Tortuguero, and residents contributed local catches to a green turtle fishery based out of Limón (the provincial capital), just south of Tortuguero.
They captured nesting female turtles on the Tortuguero beach at night, attached wooden buoys to their flippers, and floated them out to boats waiting to transport them to Limon (Parsons 1962). Commercial turtling ended when it was outlawed in Costa Rica, beginning in the 1970s, and when markets in the U.S. and Europe closed (Place 1991). Since then, subsistence or small scale legal turtling and egg harvesting in Tortuguero has also been outlawed as the result of various laws and amendments. For example, previously existing community turtling quotas have also been revoked (Campbell 2007). The most recent addition (2002) to turtle-related legislation in Costa Rica, an amendment to Law 8325: The Law for Protection, Conservation, and Recuperation of Sea Turtle Populations (2000), made all illegal turtle-taking and trading infractions punishable by jail time (Silman 2002; Campbell 2007), among other changes.

Tortuguero has undergone various economic cycles, with residents engaged in subsistence horticulture and fishing, working as laborers at nearby fruit plantations or in a short-lived lumber operation. Tortuguero National Park (est. 1975) sits adjacent to southern end of the village and comprises 26,156ha of land and 50,160ha of marine territory and protects 22 miles of turtle nesting beach (Caribbean Conservation Corporation 2007; Ministerio del Ambiente y Energia (MINAE) no date; Evans 1999). With the creation of Tortuguero National Park, and through subsequent pieces of legislation, extraction of almost all local natural resources has been curtailed; many
traditional hunting and fishing activities are now illegal, and local access to the beach and the forest is restricted within the park’s borders (Evans 1999; Campbell 2003, 2002b; Troëng and Rankin 2005).

Tortuguero’s tourism industry

Ecotourism is Tortuguero’s latest economic inception, and Tortuguero National Park is the biggest tourism draw to the area. The local environment (e.g. lush forest; lagoon and canal system) and the wildlife within it, especially nesting sea turtles, are the main attractions (Lee and Snepenger 1992; Chapter 2). Ecotourism to Tortuguero began in the late 1980s/early 1990s, with the most intrepid of travelers, such as biologists and other nature-oriented explorers (Lee and Snepenger 1992; Place 1991; Lefever 1992). Whereas only a few hundred people visited TNP annually in the early 1990s (Place 1991), over 80,000 tourists now visit the park per year (de Haro and Tröeng 2006); this number can be used as a conservative estimate for total tourist visitation since some tourists may visit Tortuguero without visiting the park.

There are no other sizeable industries in Tortuguero; for all intents and purposes, it can be considered 100% ecotourism based. Existing businesses either serve tourists (e.g. lodges, cabins, restaurants) or employees of the tourism industry (e.g. grocery stores catering to local residents) and Troëng and Drews (2004) estimate that Tortuguero’s ecotourism industry generates 6.1 million dollars of gross revenue per
year. As an economic activity, there are clear benefits of ecotourism to the residents of Tortuguero, and these have been evident since ecotourism’s inception. For instance, all turtle-seeking tourists must be accompanied by a permitted guide on the nesting beach. Many such guides live in the village and guides can make 100-200\$ a night (during turtle nesting season), depending on tour group size and tips (Peskin 2002).

Ecotourism has therefore injected a much needed source of employment and wages into the village and has created opportunities for local entrepreneurs to create and grow small businesses. The advent and growth of ecotourism in Tortuguero has also improved its connectedness with surrounding areas through increased transportation of people and goods in and out of the village, as a result of tourism and related village expansion, and increased competition (e.g. over transporting tourists in/out). Tourism has also provided new injections of income for community projects and infrastructure improvements. For example, guide money and other tourism-derived funding helped to create: an aqueduct fresh water provision system for the village, a playground for village children, and a sports hall/general assembly structure. The village’s regional prominence, its relative wealth and its growing population, all of which are inextricably linked to the local ecotourism industry, have also facilitated and
partially funded a permanent clinic building on-site and with a (shared municipal) clinic staff who see patients twice-weekly².

**Environmental concerns in Tortuguero**

Despite a reputation for successful turtle conservation and ecotourism, Tortuguero is also experiencing environmental problems related to increasing tourism and associated local population growth. While there have been no formal environmental assessments in Tortuguero (with the exception of studies relating to sea turtles, birds, and other wildlife, and a waste audit that will be described in detail later), some environmental issues are both visible and of concern to locally-living people (see Chapters 3 and 4, this thesis). These include:

- Bank erosion, canal siltation, and other water quality issues in the lagoon system (associated with increased boat traffic, much of which is related to tourism);
- Motor-boat related environmental concerns (habitat disturbance; noise pollution; water pollution);
- Declining sightings of certain wildlife species (e.g. manatees);
- Deforestation (legal and illegal) for construction and for timber extraction;
- Illegal harvesting, illegal construction (e.g. squatter settlements), and other violations of park-related legislation;
- Solid waste management problems, and resulting environmental impacts (and potential health impacts) (Chapter 3 & Chapter 4, this thesis).

² Serious infrastructure and servicing issues remain, however. For example, Tortuguero’s schools are notoriously poor in quality and have difficulty attracting and keeping full-time staff willing to teach in and live in the village. The local schools are known for administrative and staffing problems and are plagued with problems such as teachers regularly not showing up for work; the isolated location complicates staffing.
While all of these issues are important, the solid waste management crisis was one of the most visible ecotourism-associated environmental problems in Tortuguero during Meletis’ field work, and it will be the focus of this paper. Given our interest in EJ, it is also appropriate to use a waste problem in exploring EJ’s utility for framing environmental impacts associated with ecotourism.

Traditionally, when the village was smaller and included more local self-sufficiency in the form of food production (e.g. fishing, small scale animal husbandry, fruit production) (Lefever 1992), we can assume that the local waste culture was appropriate to the amounts and types of wastes being generated. There were fewer packaged goods, fewer plastics and other synthetic or non-biodegradable materials, and there were also fewer people generating solid waste. Therefore, common practices of burying household wastes in residential yards or in common areas such as the beach, and burning small piles of wastes were appropriately scaled to the waste stream composition and volume. Such practices are no longer appropriate given: 1) the great increases in the volumes of wastes being generated (by over 800 locally-living people and over 80,000 tourists a year), and 2) changes in waste stream composition; it now includes greater percentages of non-biodegradable materials (e.g. plastics) and more hazardous or otherwise problematic wastes (e.g. batteries). At the household and
community level, therefore, a gap exists between the historic waste culture and the volume and composition of the contemporary waste stream.

Tortuguero also lacks the technological capacity to manage the volume and types of waste being generated (Camacho 2003). Particularly problematic wastes for Tortuguero that are difficult to dispose of on-site and could lead to potential environmental contamination, such as plastic beverage bottles and batteries, are more likely to be tourism-associated types of solid waste (e.g. batteries for cameras; plastic water bottles as tourists avoid local drinking water).

**The history of the waste crisis**

Local waste management has been especially contentious and challenging since ecotourism began to grow in the village. At times, solid waste management problems have reached crises, with waste piling up around the village as various services have failed. Such crisis periods occurred at intervals in while Meletis was conducting field work (2003; 2004). While Tortuguero has had a ‘recycling plant’ since 2000, for various reasons (e.g. lack of funding; lack of staff; lack of local compliance; conflicts over the running of the plant; incinerator-related issues, etc.) it had to be closed down at various times. During these times of crisis, village-based residents and businesses used desperate and unorthodox means of disposing of their solid wastes, returning to traditional methods but using them on a larger scale and/or outside of their private
yards. This included burying or dumping waste on the beach or in other public areas, burying waste in private backyards, and burning waste (including metals, hazardous wastes and other wastes that should not be burned in close proximity to people) (Camacho 2003). Some locally-living people, businesses, and lodges continued to leave solid wastes at the plant when it was clearly locked, closed, and not functioning. These crisis times were reflected on the landscape; solid waste was visible in buried piles being uncovered by human trampling or beach erosion, in overflowing garbage cans, or in burning piles of garbage (Figs 4.5 and 4.6). In the summer of 2004, local residents were also burning piles of waste in plain view of tourists, which can be interpreted as their knowingly advertising the waste crisis and their frustration with it (see Chapter 3, this thesis).
Figure 4.5: A tourist to Tortuguero looking at a dump site at the beach.

Figure 4.6: Evidence of the type of ‘open burning’ of wastes that occurred in the village (observed in 2003; 2004).
Before 2000, no organized waste disposal system or plan was in place in Tortuguero. In 2000, a ‘mixed commission’ was formed to deal with waste management. Costa Rican authorities such as TNP staff, MINAE (The national ministry of environment and energy), and the municipality of Poccoci participated. As a result of this commission, and with assistance from JAPDEVA (a regional government-funded coastal development agency) and European Union-based funding, the ‘Planta de Tratamiento Integral de Desechos Solidos’ (the integrated solid waste treatment plant) was constructed in 2000. The plant is located in a central part of the village and is surrounded by several houses and stores. It is also on one of the main footpaths (used by locally-living people and tourists) and near common areas such as a village playground. Locally called the plant, the garbage plant or the recycling plant (la planta), it was to be run by the local women’s association in the hopes of not only improving local waste management, but also providing local women with new skills and an enterprise of their own.
Figure 4.7: This is the ‘recycling plant’ in 2000. It was the pride of the village on the day of its opening. Everything was shiny and new but its small size and other limitations were already evident.

From its first day in operation, it was clear that the plant had problems (Camacho 2003). The size of the plant and its limited equipment restricted its staff to mainly sorting and separating wastes into categories (e.g. recyclables vs. non-recyclables), burying waste (small organic waste scraps were buried on-site), and burning waste. The plant workers’ main tasks were to separate wastes, and to segregate each type of valued recyclable (e.g. aluminum cans) and prepare them for transportation out of the village. This transportation soon became a problem as the plant had no boat of its own and the vendors who sometimes bought some of these materials would not
reliably pick up or transport out the materials, creating storage issues for the plant. Furthermore, there is no official plan or network that integrates local efforts in Tortuguero with greater municipal waste management services and infrastructure (Camacho 2003).

The plant’s original design also included a ‘biodigester’, which apparently never worked, and was mainly used for storing waste in 2003 and 2004. Any materials deemed non-recyclable, including many plastics and baby diapers among other items, were burned in the plant’s incinerator, and likely emitted dioxins and other undesirable and toxic compounds into the air (Camacho 2003). The plant’s incinerator, which was still in use in 2003-2004 but becoming more and more problematic (i.e. increased breakdowns and slowdowns) by 2004, was a short stack, basic-looking incinerator (see Fig. 4.8). This incinerator was not equipped with the necessary devices for filtering the output before it was released into the air. The incinerator also broke down various times and often required expensive and ineffectual repairs. By 2002-2004, the incinerator was rusted, leaning, and billowing dark and malodorous smoke that regularly blew through town and left ashy deposits. Locally-living people voiced concerns about air quality and plant workers complained that, at best, the incinerator could burn for a few hours before malfunctioning. General air pollution issues aside, plant workers were also not properly outfitted for the work they were doing. They were being intimately exposed to unknown
health impacts by working in proximity to solid waste and a malfunctioning incinerator, without proper protection (poor ventilation; no regular use of masks, gloves, aprons).

Figure 4.8: The faulty incinerator referred to in the preceding paragraph. Note the short stack and ‘basic’ appearance of it. It is located at the plant, in a central location of the village, near houses and a playground.
By 2004, the plant and its workers faced increasing numbers of operational/logistical issues including changes in management (management passed from the Women’s Association to the Development Association, and then on to individual experiments with management), non-payment for waste collection and disposal services from village customers (including lodges), an inability to pay plant workers, bounced checks written by village businesses, conflicts within the village over plant management, plant equipment thefts, and uncooperative plant users (e.g. people refusing to separate wastes). As a result, it was completely malfunctioning by the end of the summer of 2004. Only one man was working at the plant and he was being paid a token salary; he could not do much but collect and bag wastes given that the plant was not functioning (Meletis 2004). During such times of peak crises, the plant was completely overrun with wastes and was acting as a storage facility by the end of August 2004. It was also a potential health and pollution hazard since all of the waste was being stored either in open piles or in bags and was being exposed to the elements on a daily basis. Concerns were such that the leader of the by-weekly health clinic staff) presented a case before the municipal tribunal with respect to the municipality’s responsibility to provide a healthy environment for its citizens, including adequate waste management provision.
Figure 4.9: This was taken inside the plant in 2004. It was closed due to various conflicts over plant management, as well as non-payment issues regarding services rendered and problems paying plant workers.

All of these plant-related breakdowns and their manifestations on the landscape occur within a community that is concerned about the quality of its local environment (Chapter 3, this thesis), and that is increasingly dependent on ecotourism and the appearance of a ‘pristine environment.’ (Akama 1996; Ryan, Hughes, and Chirgwin 2000; Carrier and Macleod 2005).
A recent waste audit

Public concern regarding the waste crisis in Tortuguero eventually led to a government-sponsored audit of the recycling plant in Tortuguero\(^3\). Despite some methodological shortcomings (e.g. waste was only measured over four days; waste was only quantified by weight, not by volume; there is no way to tell what percentage of the village waste was received at the plant during those four days; the waste received from village-based tourism businesses was not segregated but was instead counted as community-generated solid waste; only three of the lodges were bringing waste to the plant at the time), it offers some interesting suggestions about waste generation in Tortuguero. For example, even though only three of the more than fifteen lodges were sending waste to the plant, lodge-generated waste represented more than half of the waste received daily (194kg of waste from the lodges versus 176kg from the community). Lodges disposed of approximately five times the amount of plastic bottles, and more than twice the number of plastic bags as the community. Lodges also generated more ‘other plastics’, newspaper, cardboard, and glass. In general, the lodge waste included more recyclables and more non-biodegradable wastes, while the community deposited a greater amount of organic waste at the plant (Camacho 2003).

\(^3\) Currently, a village-based entrepreneur has taken over local waste management and the village is said to be relatively clean (Sherwood 2007). The focus in this paper, however, is on waste management in 2003 and 2004, when the village experienced various crises phases.
Camacho (2003) also compared the plant’s theoretical function (a comprehensive waste treatment facility, according to its original name) with what was observed at the plant. He concluded that the space and equipment were not functioning properly and that the plant was overwhelmed with solid waste. He called attention to the faulty incinerator, sold as an ‘ecological incinerator’, and recommended that it no longer be used for health, safety, and air quality reasons; it was likely to be releasing dioxins and other toxic compounds into the surrounding air when plastics and other wastes were being burned. Camacho (2003) admits that despite original hopes, the plant functions mainly as a site for waste separation, and little more.

The study also mentions ‘clandestine dumping’ and suggests that inadequate waste management could have a negative impact on tourism to the area. Camacho (2003) suggests that the number of tourists per year may represent a threat to the balance of the local ecosystem, as represented by the village’s inability to properly manage tourism-associated solid waste. He concludes that waste management shortcomings in Tortuguero are: cultural/social shortcomings (e.g. no ongoing waste-related education programs; apathy towards the waste problem), institutional (e.g. inadequate municipal support), financial (e.g. a lack of financial resources and the lack of authority to collect regular waste-related payments), and technical (e.g. deficient waste collection and disposal services are being provided). He emphasizes that in Costa Rica, municipalities
are legally responsible for waste collection and disposal services and that this responsibility is not being fulfilled in Tortuguero (Camacho 2003). Camacho insists that “the clear result is that the need for immediate action on the part of actors involved is needed to solve this problem” (Camacho 2003, 20).

**Framing Tortuguero’s solid waste crisis using EJ and five proposed characteristics**

In this section, we frame the tourism-associated waste crisis in Tortuguero using five proposed characteristics shared between Tortuguero and communities facing similar situations, and also by more conventional types of EJ communities:

1. **The siting of the land use/industry/facility is strategic; communities and places are chosen for specific geographic, political and economic reasons;**

In traditional EJ sitings, isolation and distance play two roles. Due to NIMBYism and the political clout to back it, many LULUs are pushed into more marginal neighborhoods (e.g. mostly composed of visible minority members) so that the undesirable land uses are at a distance from (white, affluent) neighborhoods, as are the impacts (e.g. water pollution; air pollution) (Bullard 1990). In ecotourism siting, the need to isolate and distance both LULUs and their impacts are not the reason why remote locations are chosen, but rather ecotourism’s impacts are aggravated/complicated due to the remote location (e.g. no easy way to transport wastes off-site).
Isolation, remoteness, and distance from urban centers is part of the appeal of ecotourism destinations. Some form of geographic isolation (e.g. no direct roads in; an island location; treks on footpaths lead into the destination) typically plays a role in such attractive rural destinations in the Global South because it contributes to the ecotourism mystique in two ways: 1) it allows for the local environment to appear relatively untouched (isolation has made resource extraction or overdevelopment less likely), and 2) it caters to the ecotourist desire for exploration and adventure through requiring longer and/or more intrepid travel into the destination since it is ‘off the beaten path’ (Nelson 2005; Wight 1996; Mowforth and Munt 1998). This isolated, ‘seemingly undeveloped’ image is often added to by low levels of existing infrastructure and/or low levels of modernization reflected in the local built form (Carrier and Macleod 2005; Akama 1996). Ironically, this desirable isolation complicates keeping local communities connected to outside support systems and networks, and creates impact management challenges because in terms of location, it literally leaves the community alone (isolated) to deal with its impact-related problems (Hillery et al. 2001).

Isolation is a key part of Tortuguero’s attraction. With no access by road and no cars in town, Tortuguero’s relative inaccessibility makes it seem more ‘natural and pristine.’ It also satisfies ecotourist desires for adventure and exploration in that it is relatively ‘off the beaten path’, a place that you cannot ‘stumble upon’. This same
isolation complicates waste management (Meletis and Campbell 2007). For example, Tortuguero is isolated from surrounding networks of support that might assist with managing impacts, such as municipal services and markets for recyclables (Camacho 2003). Its lack of typical transportation infrastructure has been used by the municipality as an excuse for failing to provide waste collection and disposal services, that are standard in other parts of the country including Guapiles (the city that houses the offices of Pococi, Tortuguero’s municipality). The municipality of Pococi claims that its responsibilities to collect and dispose of wastes end where road access ends. Without municipal support, Tortuguero has struggled with a patchwork of trial and error waste management projects by different actors, and many community conflicts over who is most/least qualified, most able, and most responsible for waste collection and disposal services, collecting related fees, and overseeing related equipment and facilities have erupted in recent years (Chapter 3, this thesis).

Waste management needs (e.g. for collection services, and processing and disposal sites and infrastructure) also present a landscape challenge for ecotourism destinations. Although ecotourism generates waste in Tortuguero, it must appear not to. Waste and its related infrastructure must remain part of the hidden landscape (Colten and Dilsaver 2005; Thrupp 1990), especially in ecotourism, which is supposed to be low impact. The ecotourist gaze does not expect to look upon waste or related
infrastructure (Hughes and Morrison-Saunders 2003; Urry 1995; Ryan, Hughes, and Chirgwin 2000; Urry 2002; Carrier and Macleod 2005). Keeping waste and its management hidden in Tortuguero is challenging because: 1) the area includes a ‘real’ village where people live, work, and generate waste; 2) tourists come through the village proper (e.g. on village tours) and can potentially wander around most parts of the village; and 3) Tortuguero is located on a narrow land strip between two bodies of water and there is limited local capacity to ‘hide’ waste and waste-related infrastructure (e.g. hard to transport wastes without them being seen by tourists). Thus, ecotourism in Tortuguero and other such destinations places a double burden on the host community: a set of impacts that is difficult to manage and yet at the same time, must somehow remain hidden from tourist landscapes, despite local remoteness and limited abilities to deal with problems on-site.

ii. The brunt of the associated undesirable environmental impacts is borne by the community that hosts the land use/industry/facility, and the community often gets little to no assistance from impact-causing parties (barring what is required by law) to address the impacts. Conversely, investors and business owners, typically from outside of the community, tend to benefit most from the land use/industry/facility;

Traditional EJ cases in the US often included a LULU sited in a neighborhood with a high percentage of visible minority residents (e.g. Blacks; Latinos) that was also economically depressed, with few development options available to it. Most of the
proposed development options were proposed by ‘outsiders,’ such as companies and municipal governments, and most of the profits tended to stay ‘outside’ of the neighborhood as well, despite jobs and multiplier effects that may have remained in the host neighborhood. Typically, people living around the site bore the direct environmental impacts and health costs as well as the financial costs associated with these, at least before taking legal action. In Bullard’s (1990) Dumping in Dixie, he profiles many such cases in order to illustrate the commonalities between EJ cases and the patterns of unjust siting practices that exist within the US. One illustrative example is that of Union Carbide’s (UC) plant in Institute, Virginia. At the time of the facility siting, Blacks composed over 90 percent of the unincorporated community. The Union Carbide plant was one of many such chemical plants located in the area along the Kanawha River Valley, forming a ‘chemical alley’ of noxious land uses. Union Carbide had a presence in the area since World War I and by 1985 (right before Bullard’s book was published), UC was the largest employer of all of the plants, with 7,000 workers. While the UC plant was associated with some of the area’s prosperity, it was also seen as a potential health threat by local residents. Aside from ‘allowable emissions’ of over 300 chemicals that it emitted into the surrounding air (adjacent to a school and rehabilitation

4 Union Carbide’s website does not currently list Institute, West Virginia as one of their locations (www.unioncarbide.com).
center), it also had several industrial accidents that led to local symptoms and hospitalizations. Despite local appreciation for the jobs it brought to the area, an activist group called People Concerned About MIC (methyl isocyanate - the lethal substance in Bhopal, India, which was among the emissions at the UC plant) was eventually formed by concerned citizens in order to voice their concerns regarding health and safety; they wanted “justice, i.e. protection from the threat posed by the nearby chemical plant” (Bullard 1990, 54).

Parallels exist between the way such heavy industrial uses are sited and the ways in which ecotourism development occurs. Many prospective or current ecotourism-based communities are in places that ‘outside’ business interests (e.g. foreign investors) seek to develop, that conservation interests (often those of ‘outsiders’, e.g. international or foreign NGOs) seek to preserve (e.g. for charismatic mega-fauna; for ‘biodiversity’), and that offer an attractive ecotourism landscape (e.g. nice views, a ‘natural appearance’) for foreign visitors. Ecotourism therefore emerges as a potential way to meet conservation goals (related to location and natural resources) while also satisfying some local development goals (related to the state of the local economy) (Gray 2002; Campbell 1999). Thus, despite progressive definitions of ecotourism (e.g. that include a focus on local ownership and/or empowerment), ecotourism development often reproduces North-South and class-based power imbalances and associated uneven distributions of
costs and benefits (Campbell 2002b; Campbell, Gray, and Meletis in press) in ways parallel to more traditional EJ cases. Furthermore, many of the critiques of ecotourism as an elitist activity with limited access for the wealthy few (e.g. Akama 1996; Mowforth and Munt 1998; Thrupp 1990; Cater 2006), parallel EJ critiques of mainstream environmentalism (Bullard 1993).

The need for outside investment also parallels traditional EJ cases. Many prospective ecotourism communities are in need of replacement economies, having previously participated in extractive economies (e.g. logging; hunting; fishing) that for various reasons have bottomed out (Thrupp 1990; Nygren 2003; Campbell, Gray, and Meletis in press), but lack the financial capital to create one on their own. Ecotourism is often part of a very limited set of development options proposed/made available to such communities and therefore often has the potential to create issues of dependency.

Employment and revenues are often the focus (e.g. of official assessments), despite local concerns that may exist, and despite revelations in the literature about common shortcomings of ecotourism in practice (e.g. undesirable environmental impacts persist). Therefore, ecotourism can be considered a form of ‘economic blackmail’ - a term used to describe how noxious facilities and other LULUs are ‘sold’ to communities in need as bringing employment and income, in more conventional EJ cases (Lee 1993).

Accordingly, ecotourism development can parallel ‘environmental job blackmail’
(Bullard 1993) if it provides mainly low-level jobs, entails possible environmental (and health) risks for the community (e.g. through inadequate solid waste and sewage management), and few alternatives to ecotourism employment are available.

The case of hazardous waste facility sitings and the subsequent sitings of other noxious facilities in Swan Hills, Alberta, offers a parallel in terms of the role that the desperate need for a replacement economy can play in attracting particular industries and land uses, and in getting local inhabitants to ‘consent’ to such development. The community at Swan Hills voted in favor of accepting the hazardous waste facility because it was in dire need of replacement economy since traditional industries were failing. The revenue and employment associated with the facility was enough to convince the majority of the community since they were in great economic need. Ironically, once the replacement economy was in place, the hazardous facilities present limited prospects for future development in that some industries and companies did not want to develop or invest near a hazardous waste facility. In subsequent years, therefore, additional hazardous uses were welcomed into the community because they ‘fit’ with the hazardous waste facility; the community’s development profile had become associated with hazardous uses and as such was limited to similar projects (Bradshaw 2003). Ecotourism can impose a similarly restricted development profile on communities in that its aesthetic requirements make industries that compromise the
ecotourism landscape incompatible with ecotourism development. Ecotourism-based communities are therefore limited to types of development that, at least aesthetically, appear to be ‘natural’ (Akama 1996; Carrier and Macleod 2005).

When ecotourism is operating, communities often reap a smaller portion of the benefits and bare a larger portion of the costs than the industry and its investors do. Tourism in general experiences high levels of leakage (loss of revenues to ‘the outside’), and ecotourism is no exception, often as a result of high levels of foreign (or at least non-local) ownership (Scheyvens 2002; Weaver 1998; Bhattarai, Conway, and Shrestha 2005). At the same time, many ecotourism-based communities often do not reap an appropriate percentage of the benefits given their integral roles in maintaining a successful ecotourism destination (Scheyvens 1999). As in more traditional EJ cases, despite the various ways in which community members might be benefiting from ecotourism (e.g. through employment), the costs can offset these. In the case of Tortuguero, despite estimates of the considerable revenues generated (e.g. Troëng and Drews 2004), there is evidence to suggest that high levels of leakage are also occurring. For example, all of the lodges (which house the majority of tourists to Tortuguero) and several successful businesses are extra-locally owned. Local ownership within the local industry is low, there are significant barriers to entry as a local investor (Barrera 2003; Campbell 2002a). For example, there is no local bank on-site to capture deposits or to
facilitate local investments. Furthermore, many of the local ecotourism jobs are relatively menial positions and there are limits to upward mobility (Barrera 2003); many management positions are awarded to ‘outsiders’ such as people from the Central Valley (of Costa Rica), or Nicaragua. Poorer in-migrants from surrounding areas and countries are also rumored to be undercutting local Costa Rican residents at the lower end of the ecotourism job hierarchy for positions such as chambermaids or maintenance staff.

While there are many likely environmental costs associated with ecotourism in Tortuguero, our focus is on solid waste impacts. Given that they house the majority of the 80,000+ tourists who visit Tortuguero (75% according to (Lee and Snepenger 1992)), it is not surprising that lodges generate the bulk of the volume of waste (Camacho 2003). It is not just a matter of numbers, however, but of services they provide, including restaurants with comprehensive meal buffets, bars with imported beverages, and lodge stores that sell basic supplies and souvenirs. According to lodge managers, some lodges do undertake some efforts to reduce the amounts of waste they produce; they collect organic wastes for use on a nearby farm, they provide recycling bins for their guests and they claim to transport wastes off-site for recycling or disposal. Respondents associated with the garbage plant (e.g. plant administration; plant workers in 2003) suggested that lodge participation in plant-led efforts was variable, with some outright refusing to use their services, refusing to pay for services rendered, or dumping waste at the plant.
without the correct payments. Furthermore, some locally-living people are concerned that lodges are engaging in undesirable waste management practices (e.g. illegal dumping) on or near lodge land, placing the local environment at risk (Chapter 3, this thesis).

As is the case in many other EJ scenarios, employment opportunities aside, ecotourism offers limited direct-use benefits for locally-living people in Tortuguero. It is interesting to note that as ecotourism to the village grown in the last 10 years or so, the percentage of domestic (Costa Rican) visitors to TNP has continuously decreased, while the percentage of foreign visitors increased. For example, whereas 56% of visitors to TNP in 1986 were domestic, only 12% of visitors to TNP were domestic in 2004. The percentage of foreign visitors is now over 88% (Place 1991; Harrison, Troëng, and assistants 2004). Furthermore, few locally-living people in Tortuguero use the park trails for their own enjoyment5, and much of the infrastructure is designed for tourist use. By contrast, locally-living people once benefited from using the local environment and its resources (e.g. turtles) before the establishment of the park. Costa Rica’s non-extractive park policy has required a cessation of traditional hunting activities, turtle-fishing and egg collection, and has eliminated nighttime beach access during turtle nesting season

5 There are exceptions, however. For example, some locally-living tour guides go boating (e.g. short canoe trips) in the canals for their own enjoyment, engaging in a direct use of the park.
(May to November), a privilege limited to permitted turtle guides and paying tourists. Therefore, the bulk of direct-use benefits associated with using ecotourism and conservation infrastructure in order to interact with the local environment and animals within it, accrue mainly to ‘outsiders’. Improved transportation is an exception, given that village inhabitants benefit from improvements (e.g. canal improvements) that have been influenced by tourism and corresponding village growth. Local residents must pay for such services, however, and transportation service providers often prefer to carry tourists (when possible) since tourists are charged higher rates. Local residents have also petitioned for and successfully obtained communications-related improvements as the result of local tourism success and its impacts on local commercial and residential communications needs6.

Despite tourists benefiting most from the direct-use of ecotourism infrastructure in Tortuguero (e.g. lodges; restaurants; the park’s visitor center), locally-living people must deal with resulting negative impacts such as tourism-associated solid waste generation, with limited local space and capacity to do so. Tortuguero is located in a very wet humid environment and on a very narrow strip of land, and the village is undergoing great expansion and construction in recent years. As such, few possibilities

6 Until 2002, the village relied mainly on 5 shared ‘public phones’ housed in village buildings. Within the last five years, the village has received the addition of dozens of public phone booths and hundreds of residential lines (provided at a charge, using government infrastructure), in addition to a cell tower that relays signals to the hundreds of cell phones used locally.
even exist for waste storage. Management and treatment issues aside, there simply is not enough room in Tortuguero to handle the volumes of waste being generated, especially during peak tourist seasons (e.g. May-August). Despite this lack of space in which to treat waste, few efforts have been made to reduce the amount of waste that stays on site. For example, boats bringing large amounts of packaged goods can be observed making daily deliveries to lodges and other businesses, and those same boats are not required to take associated waste products out upon departure. Furthermore, no efforts have been made to make tourists more directly responsible for the wastes they generate on site. For example, there is no ‘pack in pack out’ waste minimization policy that requires tourists visiting the area to transport garbage out of the village with them upon departure⁷.

Tourism-generated waste can also be considered ‘imported waste’ a phrase used in other environmental justice conflicts in communities dealing with the negative impacts of wastes generated by ‘others/outsiders’ (Wu and Wang 2002; Fletcher 2003). Firstly, when tourists are on vacation, they generate waste in their travel destination

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⁷ Although one could argue that this would be a difficult policy to implement in Tortuguero given considerations such as the packaged nature of most tours (i.e. tourists would be taking their trash along to the next stop) and unfavorable climactic conditions for carrying waste around, it could be done. Boats are constantly moving in and out of Tortuguero (sometimes mostly empty) to neighboring urban areas and other supply pick-up points, and transporting solid waste out on a daily basis could work the same way. The CCC sometimes sends bagged solid waste out on its boat-based supply runs, for instance. Furthermore, a targeted policy could be adopted, requiring/encouraging tourists to transport out only particularly problematic wastes such as plastic water bottles and/or batteries. This would not place an undue burden on tourists and would reduce the amounts of solid wastes that are particularly difficult to dispose of off-site.
rather than at home where they live. In that sense, they are importing wastes and related negative impacts and costs, often into areas that are less equipped to deal with such impacts than their location/community of origin. Furthermore, some waste generated by tourists on vacation is literally imported from tourists’ home countries or regions (e.g. waste generated from the use of batteries and film cases brought from home). In Tortuguero, a second type of waste can be conceptualized as an ‘imported waste’: the wastes imported into the village by lodge tourists (who are accommodated outside the village) when they dispose of wastes while in the village (e.g. by placing items in public garbage cans while in the village) rather than on-site at their respective lodges, and when lodges send their wastes to be ‘treated at the plant’. In both of these cases, disposal and related costs occur in the village, while the original purchases do not necessarily bring revenue to the village (e.g. items purchased in home countries; items purchased at the lodges). In such instances, the village receives the end-of-life consequences, while some of the benefits from multipliers associated with tourism occurs outside the village proper, either at the lodges or further a field.
iii. The impacts of the land use/facility/industry (and oftentimes the entire enterprise or components of it) are imported without well-defined community consent;

In traditional EJ cases, many problems arise with respect to the ways in which communities ‘consent’ to land uses within their neighborhoods or surrounding areas. Sometimes, there is confusion with respect to what kind of development they are consenting to. For example, Northwood Manner residents in Texas thought that they were getting a shopping center or new homes for their subdivision but they were actually getting a landfill. Once they found this out, they organized to stop the dump (Bullard 1990). Other times communities ‘consent’ to the siting of a noxious facility because they are economically depressed and/or have limited development options, as was the case in the previously cited Swan Hills example (Bradshaw 2003). Robert Bullard has pointed out that grave economic desperation has meant that traditionally, LULUs such as hazardous waste dumps, are ‘consented’ to in places that he calls “the Third World in our own backyard” (Bullard 1990: 59). In this context, the concept of ‘choice’ is limited. Furthermore, the scope of exactly what communities have ‘consented’ to often only becomes apparent once the facility is in place and its ‘impact shadow’ and associated costs (environmental; health; financial) begin to emerge; some impacts take years or decades to become apparent. Therefore, even if communities do ‘consent’, however defined, they are unlikely to consent to all of the impacts associated with a
facility since some impacts, secondary impacts, and associated costs only emerge after
the fact, often remaining unknown or undisclosed until then.

Similar patterns (lack of true ‘consent; impacts emerging over time) are emerging
in the case study literature on ecotourism, and can be seen in Tortuguero’s case as well.
As previously emphasized, the development of ecotourism in Tortuguero occurred in a
manner similar to more traditional EJ cases: the introduction of ecotourism and the
establishment of TNP can be interpreted as having been introduced by ‘outsiders’; many
important decisions affecting the village are made in places hours away from it. The
first lodges in the area were owned by foreigners (e.g. Tortuga Lodge is American-
owned) as most are still today. The park system is also heavily influenced by US park-
related policy and the US-based CCC is one of the park’s strongest advocates (Evans
1999). Since the park’s establishment, the CCC (based out of its urban office in San Pedro
and its US office) has been active in curtailing local access to the land/sea and its natural
resources through its support of and lobbying for pro-conservation legislation. The
creation of the park (1975) was decreed from the capital (San José, Costa Rica) and like
most National Park systems, Costa Rica’s is controlled from its capital city, far from
Tortuguero. There is no permanent administrative park presence in the village, only
park employees on rotating shifts, and visits from the regional administrators from the
city of Guapiles. Furthermore, while the park administrator (in 2003; 2004) was a
longtime Tortuguero resident, locally-living people claim that he spends too much time in the regional office and not enough time in the village. Furthermore, neither the establishment of ecotourism nor the introduction of the park involved a formal process of consent or participation acceptable to locally-living people in the village, despite whatever formal requirements were met. Resentment lingers over this lack of proper community consultation and over the fact that some locally-living people who were relocated from land expropriated to create TNP feel that they were inadequately compensated for their losses. They blame the Park and the government for related promises that have yet to be fulfilled (participant observation 2003; 2004).

Many respondents tend to view various levels of government as ‘outsiders’, since there is no permanent on-site government authority in the village and since many locally-living people feel that the village does not get the attention that it should from various government agencies and bodies (e.g. municipal services; the ICT; MINAE) (Chapter 4, this thesis). The political distance between Tortuguero, municipal authorities, and the national capital contributes to local perceptions of municipal and national government neglect of the village’s problems, and to creating an atmosphere of powerlessness, jeopardizing the possibility of local ‘consent.’ The lines of communication between the village and ‘outside’ decision-makers are not perceived as being open or easily accessible. The lack of interaction and control over the industry as
perceived by local respondents also includes a lack of control over the impacts of the industry (e.g., the solid waste crisis) and therefore, challenges to them being able to meet and maintain the image of ‘pristine nature’ as stewards of their local environment (Akama 1996). Several respondents also voiced feelings of powerlessness in terms of their ability to change the course of ecotourism development in Tortuguero or influence lodge (hotel)-related development (Chapter 3, this thesis). In addition to this, there are limits on how locally-living people in Tortuguero can change or guide ecotourism development from within the industry in its current inception. Locally-living people are mostly relegated to lower level jobs within the industry. Local respondents have also complained about the lack of genuine opportunities to participate in decision-making processes regarding ecotourism and environmental management (Barrera 2003) (also see Chapter 3, this thesis).

This lack of control over the industry, its locally generated tourist experience, and Tortuguero’s related image is particularly problematic because it represents a lack of local power over the future of ecotourism in Tortuguero. If the status quo is upheld and nothing changes regarding impact management and/or local participation and signs of the waste crisis persist on the landscape, there are potential risks of unmet ecotourism aesthetics, degradation of the ‘tourist product’ of Tortuguero, and negative tourist word-
of-mouth consequences (see Chapter 2, this thesis). These risks and potentially negative consequences also pose threats to local ecotourism-dependent livelihoods.

As other sections of this paper will emphasize, many local respondents reject the current state-of-affairs of the environmental impacts of ecotourism and their management. Locally-living people did not consent to: 1) unmanaged environmental impacts of ecotourism, such as the waste crisis, or to 2) paying financial costs associated with unmanaged environmental impacts of ecotourism. Respondents point out that the reason that the village gets ‘stuck’ bearing the environmental and financial costs of the waste crisis is that there are no mechanisms or venues in place to plan for or to collect funding for local waste management efforts. They call for such planning and financing spaces to be created through, for example, a legal mechanism by which to amass and return a percentage of tourism-collected funds from the park, the lodges, or the turtle tours towards solid waste management efforts. In other words, locally-living people do not consent to the current state-of-affairs with respect to Tortuguero’s ecotourism-associated waste generation, management, and (the lack of related) financing (Chapter 3, this thesis). They see waste-related impacts in the village as being the responsibility of actors who are benefiting greatly from tourism such as the lodges and the Park, and they reject the use of the village as a ‘sacrifice zone’ (Bullard 2002) for the industry’s impacts.
iv. The local discourse (they way in which locally-living people talk about the problems) often treats the land use/facility/industry and its associated impacts as an unfair, unjust situation framed using ‘us vs. them’ language;

A key component of environmental justice is the attention to the ways in which local voices present the unjust situations that they encounter, fight against, and try to prevent:

The voices … are of those speaking from ‘ground zero’ of the environmental justice movement; they are the individual and collective voices of those among us whose lives have been directly affected by the disproportionate incidence of contamination or habitat loss or lack of subsistence opportunities in their communities (Adamson, Evans, and Stein 2002, 27).

The importance of individual voices and actions that contribute to the movement is emphasized in the literature; testimonials and quotes are frequent components of ‘stories’ presented about EJ conflicts. The design of EJ references reflects the important words of community activists. For example, the title of Bullard and Chavis’ edited compilation of EJ writings (1993) is Confronting Environmental Racism. Voices from the Grassroots. Such edited volumes often include images, especially on their covers, of EJ discourse as it is represented on protesters’ placards bearing messages such as ‘don’t dump on us!’ (Bullard 1993), ‘our lives are not for sale’ (Bullard and Johnson 2000), and ‘environmental racism’ (Adamson, Evans, and Stein 2002). EJ discourse used by affected
communities captures their views of what is right/wrong in terms of the distributions of costs and benefits associated with particular land uses, facility sitings, policies, practices, and decisions in question. Discourse shared among and between communities and groups within the EJ movement is used to define who is in the wrong, who is in the right, what should be done to re-balance things, and why (e.g. because it is fair and right).

It was the ways in which respondents described the waste crisis in Tortuguero that originally suggested applying an EJ framework to this case. Individual responses and the patterns within the collected responses highlight local concerns regarding the distribution of benefits and costs associated with local ecotourism development and related impact management. Respondents spoke about what was fair/unfair and right/wrong about the waste crisis, where waste impacts occur, different actors’ involvement in waste management, and funding and support-related problems regarding improving waste management (see Chapter 3, this thesis). This focus of local comments reinforces the concept of fairness as justice, as discussed by Walker and Bulkeley (2006): “-it is rather the ‘fairness’ of the processes through which the distribution (of goods and bads) has occurred and the possibilities which individuals and communities have to avoid or ameliorate risk, or to access environmental resources which are important” (Walker and Bulkeley 2006, 656).
Respondents focused on distributive justice regarding impact management, and singled out key proponents/actors and outsiders as being those largely responsible for causing the solid waste crisis and as not doing enough to manage these or contribute to their resolution, despite the ways in which they profit from ecotourism. Respondents particularly singled out the lodge owners, the government (at all levels), especially the National Park system and the department responsible for parks: MINAE (The Ministry of the Environment and Energy), the municipal government (Municipalidad de Pococi) and the national government, as those responsible for promoting tourism while not adequately contributing to local environmental management. For example, many respondents questioned the revenue gathering (park entry fee collection) and re-distribution system of collected funds within the park network. Respondents argued that a percentage of the monies from collected park entrance fees should remain in Tortuguero and be applied to the costs of managing the local environment and tourism-related impacts. Local discourse also reveals that locally-living people consider all tourism to Tortuguero a park responsibility, not just the tourism that physically occurs inside park boundaries (see Chapter 3, this thesis). In sum, local conceptualizations of solid waste impacts associate the impacts with: 1) park domain since the tourists mainly come to see the park and attractions related to it, 2) lodge domain since they house the bulk of the tourists and reap the bulk of the profits, and 3) government domain since
they promote tourism to the area and technically, are responsible for local environmental quality (village: responsibility of the municipality of Pococi; and also the park (MINAE)).

This, coupled with emerging resistance to elements of the ecotourism industry in Tortuguero among certain members of the local population (Chapter 3, this thesis) suggest that existing environmental impacts of ecotourism in Tortuguero and/or community perceptions of them may place the future of ecotourism in the area at risk. If, as some respondents suggested, the profit-making side of ecotourism and (only) turtle conservation are being prioritized in Tortuguero, while the quality of the local environment as a place of residents for humans and other animals is ignored, this may lead to a decline of the local ecotourism product (the environment) and/or a decline in local support for ecotourism among locally-living people.

v. Affected communities often face political, economic and social challenges to demanding compensation, reparations, or assistance vis-à-vis the siting of the land use/facility/industry and its impacts.

For years, academics and activists have been drawing attention to the political, economic, and social challenges that communities affected by environmental injustices face in having their plights heard, preventing undesirable land uses, and demanding compensation or other forms or reparation for environmental injustices. The literature
contains ample evidence that environmental decision-making is political and that marginalized communities are more likely to be the recipient of LULUs partly due to their economic vulnerability and their lack of political power to block, protest, or challenge such sitings (Hamilton 1993). As Chavis summarized the infamous case of the PCB facility siting in Warren County in 1982: the county was selected because it “seemed powerless to resist” (Chavis 1993, 3). Because of their marginality, communities also face challenges in having their voices heard after a LULU has begun to take its toll; local testimonials and collected ‘evidence’ are often discredited as being anecdotal, and locally-living people are contrasted with ‘scientific experts’; they are labeled ‘non-experts’ in contrast. For example, local knowledge or other collected evidence of problems are devalued if they do not match that of experts (Simpson 2002; Edwards 2002). Čapek (1993), for example, documented the struggles waged by the community of Carver Terrace in Texarcana, Texas, for ‘the right to information’, ‘the right to a hearing’ and for ‘democratic participation’, in attempting to seek justice regarding local contamination and resulting impacts. Within the community, marginality-related impediments to being aware of the degree of local contamination and organizing for action included being reliant on outside and sometimes dubious ‘experts’, not receiving critical information in a timely and direct manner, not easily being able to present evidence or make a claim, having community-based evidence
dismissed by various authorities, and lacking formal opportunities for input (Čapek 1993). The community’s inability to draw upon much needed networks of support and information were eventually improved when a local citywide environmental group called Carver Terrace residents to a meeting and shared information with them; a coalition was later formed to bolster the political voice of Carver Terrace (Čapek 1993).

When dealing with waste management issues, isolated ecotourism communities often face political, economic and/or social challenges in demanding waste-related compensation/assistance. As discussed in previous sections, location is key—many popular ecotourism destinations are at great distances (literal and figurative) from potential networks of support and other resources. This distance can create access-related issues in terms of limiting the population’s ability to connect with existing support services and limiting the political voice of the destination community in major urban centers. Also, ecotourism is often promoted as a replacement economy or a form of development to help relieve economic depression in isolated communities. Therefore, many of these communities are economically and politically marginalized before ecotourism development occurs. In addition, the structure of a local ecotourism industry can constrain the community’s ability to organize for improved environmental management and/or the prevention or remediation of environmental injustices. For example, ecotourism can place considerable labor-related demands on its workers.
Some workers have to work long hours on a daily basis (e.g. boat captains; room attendants). In Tortuguero, for example, some people work at lodges all day and then work as turtle guides at night, leaving them only a few hours ‘off’ if any, between jobs. Positions such as guiding jobs also demand that workers be available during certain hours everyday, limiting their ability to organize or leave the village. Small business owners in Tortuguero stand to lose considerable amounts of income if they take time off or leave the village for a day or two, especially during high season. It should also be noted that the highest tourist seasons, the busiest work periods for many locally-living people, also represent peak waste generation times. Therefore, conflicts between individual work schedules, tourist season constraints, and daily responsibilities limit many local peoples’ abilities to contribute to waste management meetings or other activities.

Furthermore, many of the local employment opportunities in Tortuguero consist of shift work. With exceptions, most locally-living people are relegated to lower rungs of the ‘ecotourism’ hierarchy (e.g. have service jobs but not management jobs), with limited potential for upward mobility in the local ecotourism industry. Therefore, many local residents have limited decision-making power (Barrera 2003), as is the case in other ecotourism scenarios (Charnley 2005). Thus, residents’ abilities to initiate waste management changes ‘from within’ are limited. It is difficult to act up, resist, and make
demands while trying to make ends meet while performing long hours of shift work in an isolated area with restricted transportation schedules.

Challenges to uprising in an ecotourism community go beyond mere labor-related constraints and political challenges, however. As is the case in Tortuguero (Barrera 2003; Place 1991) local access to various forms of capital and training is often limited and thus, such communities often face challenges to funding and establishing local businesses on their own, making them economically and politically vulnerable to control by ‘outsiders’ (e.g. through foreign investment) and thus less able to resist, reject, or challenge certain development components or undesirable impacts. Technological marginality is also often an issue in the types of isolated, rural, relatively undeveloped communities in developing countries for whom ecotourism is a development option because of the typical types of remoteness, economic need, and distance from urban centers mentioned above. Furthermore, technological marginality is encouraged by the ecotourism aesthetic; the destination is supposed to look ‘natural’ and ‘primitive’ and not exhibit signs of overly modern life and technology. Locally-living people are also often conceptualized as ‘part of the ecotourism product’ rather than simply providing labor for an industry. It is difficult to act up, resist, and make demands regarding local environmental justice while preserving an idyllic ecotourism image/product (what
would the tourists see/think?); taking public action might compromise the destination image and ultimately, local livelihoods (Carrier and Macleod 2005).

**Discussion**

The analysis presented here illustrates the compatibility, appropriateness, and utility of environmental justice as a theoretical frame to understand the negative environmental impacts associated with ecotourism in the Global South in general, and with solid waste management problems in Tortuguero specifically. As with traditional EJ cases, the siting of the industry is strategic and important, there are inequities in the distributions of costs and benefits, the industry and its impacts are imported with adequate or well-defined community consent, local people themselves frame the problem in terms of ‘fairness’ and justice, and the community’s ability to address the challenges associated with negative impacts are constrained. Our analysis illustrates that there is variation in how these characteristics play out (e.g. traditional EJ case studies typically confront industries arising in already ‘degraded’ environments, while our case study concerns an industry that relies on ‘pristine’ ones), but the fundamentals are the same (e.g. locating the industries in both cases is strategic and important, and ‘outsiders’ often control large parts of the industry and reap most of the benefits, while locally-living people must bare most of the ‘costs’). In this section, we turn our attention
to the shortcomings of the EJ framework. More specifically, we consider three characteristics of the Tortuguero case that cannot easily be accounted for by conventional EJ. With this in mind, we suggest ways in which EJ might be expanded to accommodate these.

Widespread benefits, despite leakage: Unlike many industries associated with traditional EJ cases, ecotourism is desired and appreciated by most locally-living people in Tortuguero. Almost everyone benefits from its existence and growth, in one way or another, despite economic leakage associated with locally-generated tourism revenues. Benefits are mostly employment related, but also include opportunities for entrepreneurship and improved infrastructure. Despite the many concerns raised by residents, most locally-living people would be unlikely to choose a return to ‘life without ecotourism’ in order to reduce or avoid negative impacts. This type of widespread benefiting is not typically present in more conventional EJ scenarios. For example, conventional LULUs such as industrial plants or waste disposal/treatment facilities are often associated with fewer jobs linked to the industry (they tend to employ lower percentages of the surrounding population) and with more concentrated clusters of local benefits (e.g. only certain families benefit) (Bullard 1993; Maschesky 2003). It is unusual for conventional EJ industries to provide the entire underlying economic base
for a community, in the way that ecotourism in Tortuguero, and many other places like it, now does.

*Marginality versus relative wealth:* As with traditional EJ communities, Tortuguero is marginalized in many ways, as discussed in the analysis. However, while economic options are limited, ecotourism has brought wealth to the community, and Tortuguero is considered relatively well-off compared with its neighbors. Tortuguero is the most successful tourism destination in the province of Limon and it has greater employment and revenue generation opportunities than any of the surrounding villages. Many residents believe that it is due to Tortuguero’s relative wealth in the region that the municipal authority neglects it, believing the village can ‘fend for itself’. While conventional EJ communities are neglected on a variety of levels for various reasons, ‘relative regional wealth’ is not typically among them. Thus, Tortuguero’s relative wealth is not easily accommodated in an EJ frame. However, wealth does not guarantee an equitable distribution of costs and benefits or preclude the production of environmental injustices, nor does it ensure that issues associated with geographic isolation and the distance of the community from sources of potential support will be overcome. If local respondents are correct in their belief that it is because of their relative

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8 There are exceptions however, such as the siting of ‘dirty industries’ in The Tar Ponds (Sydney, Canada). Most employed residents were either directly or indirectly employed by these ‘dirty’ industries and financially benefited from their presence (Haalboom et al. 2006).
wealth that they are neglected, then it is not just a case of environmental injustices occurring in spite of relative wealth, but because of it. This scenario, where a marginalized community and its problems are neglected because of its relative wealth within an otherwise impoverished area, is a new one for environmental justice.

Another factor related to relative wealth that is not easily captured in an EJ frame is that while Tortuguero might be relatively wealthy in the municipality of Pococi, it also receives negative environmental impacts (and associated costs) of scales and types not being faced by nearby villages, as a result of the large numbers of visitors per year and the services in place to accommodate them. Perhaps then, the EJ frame should move beyond analyses focused mainly on economic and political marginalization (traditional foci), and incorporate a greater emphasis on technological and support-related (e.g. limited access to necessary support networks). In places like Tortuguero, which can no longer be considered economically poor by regional standards, social and technological marginality, and as well as limited/constrained access to sources of certain types of capital (e.g. small loans for local entrepreneurs) and potential support may persist regardless of overall increases in local income levels or standards of living. These types of marginality may in the long run increase the chances of environmental degradation (environmental poverty). Despite Tortuguero’s relative wealth, its solid waste and sewage management shortcomings should not be overlooked, or dismissed as
something the community could address (economically) if it really wanted to. Rather, they should be conceptualized as problems caused by greater systemic issues that encourage inequitable development, such as unjust patterns of government service provision to marginalized communities in the Global South (Njeru 2006; McDonald 2002) that parallels forms of government abandonment of conventional EJ communities (Bullard 1993).

Unified community opposition: Environmental justice often relies on an ‘us vs. them’ frame, in which a seemingly united community fights against an environmental ‘bad guy’ responsible for undesirable impacts. In our case, while there is some discursive use of ‘us vs. them’ (see section iv), the story is more complicated. The local politics and infighting that complicate the waste crisis in Tortuguero (see Chapter 3, this dissertation) cannot adequately be captured in an EJ frame. Despite common concerns about the waste crisis and the shared local goal of seeing waste management in Tortuguero improve, the community is divided over how it should be done, who should do it, and who has the authority to initiate such changes. This mosaic of opinions is not easily incorporated into a traditional EJ frame because the latter tends to homogenize the diversity of voices from within affected communities, united in their opposition to the industry/facility at hand. This may stem from the fact that much of the EJ literature typically focuses on activist voices and activity within a community (e.g. residents
united against a noxious facility who have formed a group), rather than the community as a whole. The diversity of opinions in Tortuguero is an important part of the waste crisis in that it complicates waste management efforts and has the power to erect obstacles to village-level cooperation with respect to any attempt at a new waste management plan. Conceptual space must therefore be created within the EJ frame in order to accommodate internal differences in understanding local environmental problems and responses to them. Without room to consider how local ‘crab antics’ in the village (Lefever 1992) complicate waste management in Tortuguero, it is difficult to understand the nature of local relationships, and to identify possible alliances and conflicts with respect to waste management.

‘Us versus us’: The solid waste crisis in Tortuguero includes an important element of self-blame among locally-living people, who see themselves, as individuals or as members of the community, contributing to the solid waste crisis. They used phrases such as ‘no tenemos cultura’ (we don’t have culture) or ‘faltamos educación’ (we lack education) to explain their lack of waste-related awareness and know-how, and a lack of respect for the environment. Respondents claimed that the community also lacks training and equipment, and general environmental awareness (see Chapter 3, this

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9 There are exceptions; some studies do identify heterogeneous and sometimes opposing views on such projects within communities (Haalboom et al. 2006; Bradshaw 2003).
thesis). A second element of self-blame relates to the community’s perceived failure to unite in its efforts to address waste-management. Respondents pointed out problems with cooperation and compliance within the community, such as individuals refusing to pay for waste disposal at the plant, breaking unwritten waste-related rules (e.g. no dumping or burying of waste in places like the beach), and otherwise refusing to participate in efforts to improve local waste management. There was also a lot of gossip among locally-living people about who does/does not do certain things to contribute to/disrupt local waste management efforts; for example, some respondents were highly critical of past efforts to run the plant (see Chapter 3, this thesis). Thus, while local respondents laid the majority of blame for waste management problems is laid at the feet of the government and the tourism lodges, they also recognized their own roles in the problems. This self-blame does not yet fit well within an environmental justice frame despite the recognition by some scholars that communities members are involved in shaping EJ scenarios (including to contributing to environmental problems), rather than simply being passive victims of them (Njeru 2006; Pellow 2000; Harvey 1996).

The overlooked 4th party: In traditional EJ cases, three actor-groups are typically highlighted: the community, the government, and the industry/company/facility. An EJ frame does not typically extend to the consumer of the product/service that is causing environmental injustices, as consumers of products (or producers of wastes) are often
geographically removed from the site. This is arguably a weakness of EJ in general, but it becomes particularly problematic in the case of tourism, where consumers come to the site and their individual and collective roles in the problem at hand are visible and more direct. In our case study, tourists are implicated in the waste problem in several ways: 1) they generate solid waste while in the village (e.g. by drinking bottled water and disposing of bottles on site); 2) they import Western lifestyles into the village (e.g. by drinking bottled water; using disposable batteries; buying packaged goods); and 3) they create the need for tourism infrastructure (to house and feed them, and provide them with other services), and meeting these needs also generates waste. In one sense, therefore, tourists are exporting waste from their home countries, where they would otherwise be generating waste and consuming services, into Tortuguero.

While we feel the absence of the fourth party, i.e. the consumer, is a general weakness in EJ that becomes especially visible in our case. Locally-living people themselves overlook the role of the tourist in waste problems in Tortuguero (Chapter 3, this dissertation). Tourists were generally described as being different, i.e. a gentler, more eco-friendly type of tourists. Perhaps tourists escape blame because they are just ‘passing through’ and are not associated with industry management. Or, perhaps tourist-local interactions are generally positive rather than adversarial and no feelings of distrust similar to those locally-living people direct at the government and the lodges
exist. Another possibility is that locally-living people don't openly blame tourists for fear of losing tourist dollars; they may have adopted a discourse of tourists ‘helping the village’ because it fits with tourist perceptions of their trips. Further research is needed to tease out an explanation for the lack of connection made between tourists and the waste crisis, by local respondents (tourists also fail to implicate themselves in waste problems, see Chapter 2, this thesis).

Incorporating the tourist into an EJ framework may be a possibility on the horizon. Environmental justice scholars have recently begun to extend the exploration of the relationships and associated power dynamics implicated in environmental injustices back to the consumer, exposing links between environmental injustices, consumer demand, and drivers of that demand (e.g. Rees 2003; Martinez-Alíer 2003). Work on the political ecology of consumption also offers promise for extending the analysis of tourism-associated impacts beyond the industry itself, to tourists. Recent works on the political ecology of consumption conceptualize tourists and other consumers: 1) as individual and collective impact producers and therefore partly responsible for the impacts of the industries that cater to them, and 2) as political agents, with the (potential) power to change their own impact contribution and/or the impacts of industries on a larger scale (through consumer power: changes in demand) (Meletis

**Conclusions**

One of the goals of this paper was to provide an example of how tourism scholars can ‘borrow’ concepts from other fields to inject theory into tourism cases studies to help illuminate key issues. This unconventional use of an EJ frame to contemplate ecotourism and the solid waste crisis in Tortuguero makes several contributions to our understanding of EJ, of ecotourism, and of the specific case of Tortuguero.

First, our paper illustrates the appropriateness of applying EJ to ecotourism. It reveals that environmental injustices occur in industries typically not represented in the EJ literature, such as tourism. It also illustrates how isolated ecotourism-based communities in the Global South and more conventional EJ communities share common characteristics, although they may appear to be very different on first glance. For example, while both types of communities may be slated for ‘development’ because they are marginalized, traditional EJ cases often take place in hyper-urban environments that were considered ‘degraded’ or less ‘desirable’ neighborhoods for various reasons. Ecotourism on the other hand, is supposed to be situated in the most pristine or seemingly pristine environments. In the Global South, however, such environments are
often inhabited by communities facing constraints, challenges, discrimination, and limited sets of development options similar to those faced by more conventional EJ communities. For example, they may be considered too remote or unpopulated to justify the extension of certain basic services such as municipal waste collection.

Second, the paper illustrates some of the ‘new’ issues that can arise when EJ is expanded to include non-traditional industries. For example, we highlighted that the element of ‘self blame’ evident among locally-living people is not easily accommodated in a traditional EJ approach. We return to this issue here, by reflecting on why self-blame arises. We suggest that one of the ways that ecotourism is perhaps most different from traditional EJ industries is the extent to which ecotourism involves local community members figuratively selling themselves. In ecotourism, community members become part of the village aesthetic (Nelson 2005; Mowforth and Munt 1998; Smith and Duffy 2003; Ateljevic and Doorne 2005), and are often depicted as stewards of their environment who should be ‘in tune’ with nature and related environmental management (Norton 1996; Bryant and Goodman 2004). In Tortuguero, local people are proud of their local environment, in spite of any concerns they have with its management (see Chapter 3, this thesis). If the local environment appears dirty and/or poorly managed, it threatens not only local livelihoods, but peoples’ images (both self- and externally imposed) as stewards. It is perhaps because of this intimate tie between
locally-living people and the ecotourism product that self-blame and associated guilt arises; there are issues of identity at stake. We suggest that the personal connections between community members and the industry are quite different than those seen in conventional EJ scenarios in which most communities may live nearby or supply labor for the industry/facility in question, but lack a deeper personal connection to it.

Third, the paper also demonstrates the utility of using an EJ frame to understand the environmental impacts of ecotourism in general and the solid waste crisis in Tortuguero. As discussed in our introduction, it is almost counter-intuitive to think about environmental justice in ecotourism settings, given ecotourism’s explicit agenda of both conserving natural resources and contributing to local development. However, our case study is one in which locally-living people identify the solid waste crisis as an environmental injustice, despite the benefits of ecotourism they are experiencing individually and/or as part of the village, and despite the village’s relative wealth in its region. While the benefits of ecotourism are real, numerous, and much appreciated in Tortuguero, this does not change the fact that the solid waste crisis is viewed as an unjust situation. As such, this case study is a good example of how ‘the compensation mentality’, where economic benefits are assumed to overwhelm any negative impacts of a particular industry, does not necessarily work in ecotourism either. As demonstrated in more traditional EJ cases, communities may feel that money
earned through ecotourism is not enough to ‘pay’ for the environmental costs that the community might incur as a result of ecotourism development.

It seems especially counter-intuitive to raise the issue of environmental justice in Tortuguero, a renowned turtle conservation and ecotourism ‘success’ (Troëng and Rankin 2005; Safina 2006). However, our analysis (and that of Chapters 2 and 3, this thesis) highlights the tensions or conflicts that can and often do exist between wildlife conservation needs (e.g. placing the health and welfare of animal populations and their environment first), the aesthetic needs of ecotourism (e.g. demanding a pristine environment; no modern infrastructure such as waste management facilities should be visible), and the human development needs in ecotourism-based communities (e.g. the need for a healthy and sound environment for humans; the need for local ecotourism infrastructure such as solid waste and sewage related services to grow at a rate corresponding to visitation and its corresponding impact generation). The environmental injustices associated with the solid wastes crisis suggest that the ‘successful’ reputation of ecotourism in Tortuguero is somewhat bio-, and more specifically, animal-centric: if turtle nesting numbers are increasing and the turtle tourism revenues are being generated, ecotourism must be working (Troëng and Drews 2004; Troëng 2004; Troëng and Rankin 2005). This focus on turtles and turtle conservation as indicators of success is problematic in that it masks issues arising in
other areas of the environment, such as waste management. In Tortuguero, the focus of the majority of management efforts on turtle nesting and turtle viewing (during the turtle nesting season) is criticized by locally-living people because this turtle-focus comes at the expense of other important environmental issues (e.g. impacts of motor boat use in the canals; poaching of terrestrial species in the park; declining manatee populations) (see Chapter 3, this thesis). Solid waste management, especially on the beach, should be of concern to turtle conservation efforts due to the direct connections between solid waste and turtle fitness, if nothing else. Waste management shortcomings manifest themselves on the beach, where village-associated waste is illegally dumped and buried and where marine debris from elsewhere is carried onshore. This represents a threat to turtles: waste is often exposed and re-exposed at the surface through wave action and bank erosion, where it decomposes and has the potential to leach hazardous materials or attract bacteria that could endanger turtle egg clutch health on the beach. Solid waste that ends up back in the water also represents potential threats such as entanglement and ingestion-related problems- turtles are known to become tangled in marine debris and to ingest it, mistaking it for food (Özdilek et al. 2006; Derraik 2002). Furthermore, turtle-watching ecotourists expect pristine environments, especially those shared with the main ecotourism attraction (the sea turtles). In the case of the ecotourism-associated solid waste crisis in Tortuguero, locally-living people, tourists,
and the turtles themselves all ‘lose out’ as the result of the local inability to manage wastes on-site, and reluctance of the local government, the Park (MINAE) and the lodges to contribute to local waste management on a steady basis.
Conclusion

Ecotourism is an important development option in many locations of the Global South with few alternative economic choices. It can be a less environmentally destructive industry than some extractive economic activities (e.g. mining, logging), and it may bring greater economic, social, and political benefits. We recognize the importance of ecotourism as development both internationally and at the local level, and as we have made clear in a recent publication, “we are in no way arguing for the end of ecotourism to parks and protected areas. Such a call would be naïve and, if heeded, the impacts would be undesirable in many places” (Campbell, Gray, and Meletis 2007: 214). However, we argue that there is nothing in inherent in ecotourism that guarantees any of its alleged benefits. While this dissertation is not to call for an abandonment of ecotourism as a form of development, it is a call for more critical approaches to it. Specifically, our purpose has been to add to the ecotourism literature in innovative ways, to raise questions about certain practices and assumptions within the study of ecotourism, and to present previously under-explored aspects of ‘the story of ecotourism in Tortuguero’, one of the oldest and most famous turtle-based ecotourism sites in the world. I conclude this dissertation by reviewing the ways in which we have met the research objectives and by contemplating where we should go from here.
**Objective 1. To contribute to an improved theoretical understanding of ecotourism**

The efforts to introduce existing social theory into the case study of Tortuguero represent unique contributions to the literature; no one has applied environmental justice or resistance theory towards understanding ecotourism development in Tortuguero specifically, and there are very few applications of either theory to ecotourism or tourism in general (see Chapters 3 and 4 for discussion of the relevant literature). The novel application of environmental justice to frame the solid waste crisis in Tortuguero is particularly appropriate given the importance of waste-related conflicts in tradition environmental justice scenarios. This dissertation illustrates the utility of social theory for formulating interpretations of collected data about locally-living people; interpretations that help us better understand or explain observed patterns rather than simply classifying behaviors, actions, and statements as signs of happy/unhappy hosts. In this dissertation, for example, apprehension and resistance have been revealed as new complications to ‘the official story’ of the community’s acceptance and appreciation of ecotourism in Tortuguero. This allows for a more nuanced picture of how ecotourism is unfolding in the village in terms of the local lived experience, a picture that is considerably more complex than one that emerges from a traditional focus on the economic and conservation gains of ecotourism in Tortuguero.
Our analysis suggests that ecotourism can be both appreciated and resisted at the same time. Likewise, issues of blame and responsibility are complex, with locally-living people blaming traditional management authorities, the ecotourism industry, and themselves (but not tourists, a point we return to later).

In addition to injecting new theory into the case study of ecotourism in Tortuguero, we also propose ways to expand the theoretical relevance of environmental justice theory. We argue that while EJ can accommodate an analysis of ecotourism-related environmental injustices to a certain degree, using the five characteristics that we propose (see Chapter 4), it does not easily allow for relationships of blame that do not fit neatly into an ‘us vs. them’ framework. For example, there is no obvious way to accommodate the self-blame expressed by many respondents about the community’s lack of awareness and capacity to deal with waste. Furthermore, in EJ, the blame associated with undesirable impacts typically lies with a particular entity such as a company and/or an industrial site. In the case of ecotourism, undesirable impacts are generated by somewhat diffuse sources (e.g. in Tortuguero: the lodges, the cabinas, restaurants, transportation companies, tourists, etc.) that cannot easily be lumped together and that are all contributing different types/amounts of impacts. Lastly, EJ (recent exceptions aside, e.g. Rees and Westra 2003; Njeru 2006) does not extend to
tourists and their roles as consumers/producers with the power to effect change regarding their own impacts; this suggests room for conceptual expansion of the frame.

**Objective 2. To contribute to a more holistic understanding of the impacts of tourism including considering waste management as more than a technical environmental problem**

The solid waste crisis described here is not measured in terms of volumes, weights, and degrees of contamination in the environment. Rather, it is linked to ecotourism is an act of consumption (as part of the purchasing associated with ecotourism: the trip and on-site purchases, and as part of the figurative consumption of the environment as well) and a consumptive force (trash as a result of how ecotourism consumes the environment) (Chapter 1 and Chapter 4). Waste is also revealed as permeating the visiting ecotourist gaze, but in ambiguous ways. While tourists notice and are critical of solid waste on the landscape, suggesting potential negative impacts on word-of-mouth recommendations, they are overall satisfied with their experiences - a perplexing combination (Chapter 2). Trash is also discussed as: 1) an example of the failings of ecotourism in practice in Tortuguero, where local waste management is inadequate due to various on-site limitations and the lack of links to external supports; 2) as a symptom of the structure of the industry that locally-living people reject and react against, e.g. a structure that directs inadequate funding to addressing environmental impacts, and; 3) as a tool for local resistance to elements of ecotourism
development, shown in local refusal to adhere to local waste management requests and through the overt burning and burying of waste (Chapter 3). Finally, the biocentric and discriminatory planning practices that can permeate ecotourism development in the Global South are framed as creating environmental injustices, linking waste to global, regional, and local power struggles (over conservation and development) and positioning ecotourism as a less benign form of development than originally thought (Chapter 4).

**Objective 3. To present voices from the locally-lived experience of ecotourism**

This dissertation illustrates the value of incorporating ethnographic work and other forms of qualitative analysis into the study of ecotourism, by bringing forth components of the ‘story of ecotourism in Tortuguero’ that have not previously been noted. The data presented here serve to update the literature on Tortuguero, but also offer examples of how qualitative methods allow the researcher to delve into the ‘messiness’ of ecotourism in practice (Smith and Duffy 2003), and offer rich detail about how ecotourism unfolds at the local level, in ways that meta-level analyses may not. Our chapter on local perspectives of Tortuguero reveals that respondents can both appreciate ecotourism’s role in the village and in their own lives and, at the same time, resent certain elements of it and/or exhibit resistance to components of the industry. This challenges the dichotomy presented in some ‘host models’ (Doxey 1975) and case
studies of tourism in which locally-living people, or individual groups of them, appear to either be satisfied or unsatisfied with tourism development, leaving little conceptual room in between. The variety of tourist responses, respondent demographics, levels of involvement in ecotourism and locally-living perceptions of the industry are well captured by such in-depth qualitative approaches and once emphasized, it becomes clear that key details might remain in the margins of the ‘official story of ecotourism in Tortuguero’ until those writing the story incorporate local and tourist voices.

**Objective 4. To further our understanding of the ecotourist and ecotourism aesthetics**

Prior to this study, little was known about the tourists who visit Tortuguero; previous studies focused primarily on demographics, motivations, and interests (Jacobson and Robles 1992; Lee and Snepenger 1992; Place 1991), and much has changed in Tortuguero since these were conducted. Our analysis offers new ideas and suggestions based on a survey of tourists visiting Tortuguero during the green turtle nesting season. For example, the tourist perceptions of Tortuguero that Meletis collected reveal some of the contradictions in the ecotourism aesthetic- the respondents were primarily interested in nature and wildlife, and yet appeared to be relatively unconcerned about local environmental or human health as related to the waste crisis that was clearly evident at the time of their visits. Furthermore, respondents did not
associate tourism or themselves with the waste on the landscape, calling into question their supposedly enlightened ecotourist perspective. Tourists absolve themselves and are absolved by the local people. This highlights that there is still work to be done on getting both tourists and locally-living people to include tourists as part of the landscape of ecotourism, both as part of the problem and of potential solutions.

Questions raised and ideas for future research

The data presented in this dissertation question some of the key assumptions about the ecotourist and ecotourism. The included chapters remind us that ecotourism is consumptive and presents the solid waste crisis in Tortuguero as evidence of this. We have also interwoven social, economic, and political factors within the chapters whenever possible, in order to illustrate the dangers of separating these from one another and from environmental impacts in attempting to understand or explain the complexities of ecotourism in practice; it is in separating impacts as environmental or social that a piece of the ‘story’ remains hidden. For example, in Chapter 4, we provide an interpretation that suggests that the biocentrism of ecotourism, among other factors, may be creating social, environmental, and economic burdens on so-called ‘host communities’, highlighting the need to approach impacts in a more holistic way. We also suggest the need to rethink our conceptualizations of the ecotourist and the
ecotourism aesthetic and we encourage a re-conceptualization that would better reflect existing complex realities. Given that remote and marginalized communities of the Global South are common sites for ecotourism development, this dissertation also seeks to raise questions such as the following, in the hopes of contributing to existing debates about ecotourism: For many isolated ecotourism destinations in the Global South, maintaining an ecotourism aesthetic requires meeting the gaze, while at the same time trying to overcome limitations on local capacity to do so (e.g. marginalized service extension from municipalities; a lack of local technical capacity and/or space to deal with impacts). How can communities such as these attempt to rectify environmental management shortcomings (e.g. to deal with waste crises) while not disturbing the gaze and potentially putting the destination reputation at risk?

When I first began this doctoral project, I had intended to study the connections between waste and tourism in Tortuguero in a more technical way, through waste stream analyses, waste weight measures, and waste transects in the village and on the beach. After spending some time in the village, however, it became apparent to me that the ‘waste problem’ was intimately linked to many non-technical factors of village life and thus, I decided to focus on the ‘human side’ of the waste-tourism connection. The four chapters in this dissertation, therefore, each represent efforts to contemplate the solid waste crisis in Tortuguero as an example the larger problems that constitute the
differences that often exist between ecotourism in theory and ecotourism in practice, particularly in remote destinations in the Global South. This contemplative exercise raises new questions for future research.

First, the ecotourist is clearly not as neat and tidy tourist category. Much work remains to be done on understanding the ecotourist, particularly newer ‘versions’ such as the eco mass tourist or the package ecotourist (Ryan, Hughes, and Chirgwin 2000; Weaver 2001), a type that seems to be increasingly important in Tortuguero and internationally. This is not a call to come up with newer, better ‘typologies’; our data suggest the diversity of ecotourists limit the utility of such categorization. Perhaps tourists could be re-conceived as exhibiting certain combinations of dynamic tendencies (e.g. nature-seeking and comfort-seeking), for example, rather than trying to fit them into more rigid typologies. The data collected on tourists perceptions of Tortuguero could also be further analyzed in order to see if particular response patterns exist along demographic lines (e.g. gender, age, income level) or accommodation types (cabina vs. lodge respondents); such work could add more information to the little we know about the ecotourists who visit Tortuguero.

Second, in Chapter 1 we forward the suggestion of re-working the gaze to accommodate environmental management challenges, but we also recognize that tourists may not be open to such formal incursions on the gaze. It is possible that such a
re-working experiment already exists somewhere (e.g. in a national park or as part of a ‘leave no trace’ program) or that potential future experiments with on-site interpretation could include explaining current management challenges and then studying tourist perceptions of such efforts. Such endeavors would also contribute to the previously mentioned goal of helping tourists to connect the negative impacts associated with ecotourism with themselves as ecotourists, rather than leaving themselves out of the equation.

Third, a more unique set of possible research questions arises from the ways in which this dissertation incorporates social theory from outside of tourism studies. An interesting exercise in critical and interactive human geography of resistance might be, for example, to present the interpretation of resistance suggested in Chapter 2 to the respondents themselves and to solicit their responses to it in order to see how well the interpretation ‘fits’ with local self-understandings. Another potentially interesting project would be to use one of the theoretical framings suggested in this dissertation (e.g. resistance and the ‘alternative story of ecotourism development in a place’) and to re-visit existing case studies of similar tourism-based communities and to investigate whether or not similar patterns emerge and if so/not, why might that be the case? Such questions might help to reveal key factors in community buy-in or rejection of ecotourism or might highlight cultural context-specific complications of ecotourism.
development. The frames used here seem to have the potential for cross-comparisons between case-studies (an identified need in tourism research) and understanding specific differences and similarities between sites (e.g. in the local presence of resistance) rather than just comparing overall evaluations of each site, might lead to new understandings of ecotourism development and the factors that play into it in different contexts.

Finally, tourism in Costa Rica continues to be popular and the national government continues to promote its growth and expansion. Tourism to Tortuguero continues to grow as well (de Haro and Tröeng 2006). The village and tourist service base is expanding accordingly and occupying an increasing amount of a very small strip of land. These facts, along with the data on tourist and local perceptions of tourism and the environment presented here, suggest that the need from some kind of comprehensive planning in Tortuguero is long overdue: environmental impacts are permeating the tourist gaze (regardless of an ambiguous response to these); perceived crowding is felt by some respondents; locally-living respondents worry about current levels of growth and maintaining environmental quality; and the solid waste crisis itself represents the types of challenges Tortuguero faces in dealing with its popularity. All of this might seem very daunting for a community without an elected on-site authority, without an extensive support system, and without uniform agreement on the directions
in which future development should go. This dissertation, however, presents data that provides a new picture of ecotourism in Tortuguero (2002-2004) which might prove useful in informing future planning efforts. For example, if interested, local organizations could use the result that 34% of respondents commented on trash on the beach to lend weight for proposals for increased efforts to clean up the beach. Also, accommodation or tour operators in the village might be interested in the suggestions included about tourist demographics- they might provide insight into how they should tailor their services.

More importantly, however, this dissertation includes possible ways to re-direct or re-focus local ecotourism development. The way to a ‘better’ ecotourism future for Tortuguero might include a re-working tourist expectations and their gazes to incorporate local waste management challenges and an inclusion of opportunities for potential tourist inputs and contributions towards resolving these. A more realistic portrayal of ecotourism in the literature could eventually lead to more realistic tourist expectations on the ground and thus, help to relieve some of the local stress over ‘keeping up appearances’. Furthermore, the local perceptions of tourism planning presented in this dissertation suggest that if an effort was made to undertake more inclusive and participatory decision-making (that includes the lodges and the parks
sharing responsibility for the local environment), resistance in the village might decrease.

Similarly, the adoption of an environmental justice framing for the waste crisis in Tortuguero and beyond could, for instance, lead to ways forward in terms of increased community organizing for improved waste management and/or to the creation of larger activist networks (more unified demands and action) in which reparations of sorts could be demanded from the ecotourism industry for waste-related injustices it has caused worldwide. The point here is that perhaps one of the most valuable contributions of this thesis is that it does not stop at a critique of ecotourism, as many other studies do, but rather posits ways to re-think, re-value, and re-organize ecotourism, both in theory and in practice, with the hope of creating more just outcomes for people and environments.
Appendix A: Visitor survey.
Thank you for participating in this survey (double-sided); it should take approx. 5 minutes to complete.

This survey is part of my doctoral research on tourism in Tortuguero, at Duke University. The results will be used in my doctoral thesis and will also be provided to the community of Tortuguero. The names of participants will remain confidential; the information will only be presented to the community in the form of an aggregate data set.

- Please take as long as you need to complete the survey. Please feel free to use Spanish, English, or French.
- Please feel free to return the survey to me at any time if you no longer wish to participate.

1) Where are you staying in Tortuguero (name of lodge/cabina/organization)?

2) How did you get to Tortuguero? (please circle one of the following answers)

   a) Boat  b) Boat/bus combination  c) Airplane  d) Other: __________________________

3) What are you interested in seeing while in Tortuguero?

4) Why did you come to Tortuguero? (please circle the primary reason/main purpose of visit)

   a) For a general visit.
   b) To visit friends/family.
   c) To visit Tortuguero National Park.
   d) To go on a turtle walk.
   e) To go bird watching.
   f) To volunteer here. If volunteering, please indicate host organization: _________________________
   g) Other reason: __________________________

5) How long have you been in Tortuguero? (please circle one of the following answers)

   a) 0-1 days  b) 2-3 days  c) 4-7 days  d) more than 7 days
6) How long do you plan to stay in Tortuguero? (please circle one of the following answers)

a) 0-1 days  b) 2-3 days  c) 4-7 days  d) more than 7 days

7) What is your overall impression of the following:

The beach at Tortuguero:

The village of Tortuguero:

Tortuguero National Park:

Tourism in Tortuguero:

*The turtle tours in Tortuguero:

*The CCC (Caribbean Conservation Corporation):

8) What do you like the most about Tortuguero?

9) What do you like the least about Tortuguero?
VISITOR PROFILE

The following information will be used to analyze the relationships between demographic information such as age category, gender, occupation, and income category, and perceptions of the environment and tourism in Tortuguero. It will also provide valuable information to the village with regards to the types of tourists visiting.

Country of origin: _______________________

Your age category (please circle one answer):

- a) 18 and under
- b) 19-25
- c) 26-40
- d) 41-50
- e) 51-60
- f) 61 and older

Gender: Female _____ Male _____ Other _____

Occupation/Job: _______________________

Approximate annual household income in US dollars:

- a) under $20,000
- b) $20,000- 29,000
- c) $30,000- 39,000
- d) $40,000- 49,000
- e) $50,000- 59,000
- f) $60,000- 69,000
- g) $70,000- 79,000
- h) $80,000 and above

If you would like to receive information regarding the results of this study, please include your name and e-mail address below. This information will be used for update purposes only:

THANK YOU AND HAVE A GREAT VACATION!
Appendix B: Resident interview guide.
Thank you for participating in this interview; it should take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

This interview is part of my doctoral research on tourism in Tortuguero, at Duke University. The results will be used in my doctoral thesis and will also be provided to the community of Tortuguero. The names of participants will remain confidential; the information will only be presented to the community in the form of an aggregate data set, with no names attached. Please feel free to stop the interview at any time, or to ask me questions.

The names of participants will remain confidential in the final research product.

1) Where do you live in Tortuguero (which approximate part/area)?

2) How long have you lived in Tortuguero?

3) In your opinion, why do most tourists come to Tortuguero (what is the main reason)?

   a) For a general visit.
   b) To visit family/friends.
   c) To visit Tortuguero National Park.
   d) To go on a turtle walk.
   e) To go bird watching.
   f) To volunteer here.
   g) Other reason: __________________________

4) What is your overall impression of the following areas:

   a) The beach at Tortuguero:

   b) The village of Tortuguero:
c) Tortuguero National Park:

d) Tourism in Tortuguero:

5) What do you like the most about Tortuguero?

6) What do you like the least about Tortuguero?

7) What, in your opinion, is the biggest benefit of tourism in Tortuguero for the community?

8) What, in your opinion, is the biggest threat to Tortuguero associated with tourism development?

9) What are the main environmental impacts of tourism in Tortuguero?

10) Is the community doing enough to address these problems? Is this adequate- why or why not?

11) Do you feel that the environment in Tortuguero is being properly managed?
12) If yes, who or what are the major contributors to this successful management?

13) If not, who should be managing the local environment?* What needs to be changed?*
14) Do you think that Tortuguero is managing its solid wastes (garbage, litter) effectively or ineffectively?

14a) Why or why not?

15) If you could change one thing about the way tourism development and the environment are managed in Tortuguero, what would it be?

16) What do you see in the future of tourism in Tortuguero?

GENDER: ____________

APPROX AGE: a) 18 and under
              b) 19-25
              c) 26-40
              d) 41-50
              e) 51-60
              f) 61 and older

If you would like to receive personalized updates regarding the results of this study, please include your name and e-mail address below. This information will be used for update purposes only:

Please feel free to e-mail me should you wish to ask me any additional questions: zam@duke.edu, or to seek me out when you see me around the village if you would like to contribute additional information, or would like to ask me some questions.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH AND HAVE A GREAT DAY!
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Biography

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