

HOW CAN AN ECO LODGE BECOME A  
SUSTAINABLE  
AND SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS MODEL:  
ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL, AND  
ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVES

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Master Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the Degree  
Master of Science  
in International Tourism Management

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Vienna, 20 May 2016

## Affidavit

I hereby affirm that this Master's Thesis represents my own written work and that I have used no sources and aids other than those indicated. All passages quoted from publications or paraphrased from these sources are properly cited and attributed.

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# Abstract

Starting from the worldwide need for a change towards a more sustainable development under an economic, social and environmental point of view, this paper attempts to analyze and explain how ecotourism and ecolodges in particular can help such a need.

This work in fact, which is primarily focused on the rather new concept of eco-accommodations, wants to understand if and how they are really able to guarantee a sustainable tourism development (with regards to the specific destination where they are implemented) and which factors are predominant and necessary to implement this type of business.

The main objective of this research is to analyze and discover whether and how an ecolodge can be considered feasible under an economic, social and environmental point of view. The term feasible in this context is meant as an overall process where the various aspects that are analysed (economical, environmental and social) fit all together in order to generate a wholesome business model which is not exclusively beneficiary for the entrepreneur but also for the local community and the surrounding ecosystem.

Initially it is important to clarify the concepts of ecotourism and eco-accommodations, identify the common features they need to have and analyze them under different perspectives through the real examples provided. This part is conducted using the previous literature and case study available. Afterwards some open-ended question interviews are performed to different eco-accommodations managers and owners in order to have some in-depth knowledge and as a result a business plan is executed.

Thanks to previous research and results it is possible to state whether and under which circumstances eco-resorts are feasible considering the social, environmental and economic features.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Research Topic

Tourism is one of the biggest industries nowadays and it is gaining more and more importance around the world. From one perspective, in order to get more economical benefits from tourism, people working in this field are not always concerned about the environment they are penetrating and exploitation and excessive use of natural and social resources, especially in developing countries, are common issues. These are constant problems as many companies and organizations usually coming from more developed countries enter with increasing frequency into these poorer markets as prices are lower and laws and policies are easier to bypass. Unfortunately, it is frequent to find cases of unconscionable use of natural and social resources at the expenses of the local population and the environment (Mowforth & Munt, 2009). According to Honey (2008) the drastic ecological footprint human beings are generating on planet earth since decades is an indisputable fact and many questions about the possible catastrophic scenarios in a near future come up inevitably.

In order to satisfy increasing population needs the unsustainable industrial development outcomes are now starting to be visible as natural resources, whole habitats and environments have been and are currently overexploited and consequences are evident: climate change, melting of ice, increasing numbers of extinction of animals and plants species are just some of the results (Honey, 2008). On the other side though, in line with the needs of global sustainable development the touristic sector it is trying to develop since few decades a conscientious way to travel based on eco experiences aiming on the preservation and the enhancement of natural and social resources.

## 1.2 Importance of this research

The importance of this research is contextualized with my studies in International Tourism Management and the commitment for the natural and social environments. Awareness to adopt practices for a sustainable type of tourism is constantly increasing, although certain concepts and dynamics are not yet particularly widespread and understood. According to The International Finance Corporation (2004) experts agree that ecotourism and so ecolodges market will grow with an

annual rate of 10% in the next decades and it can be considered as the most dynamic touristic markets.

Another important motivation for this research can be contextualized with the growing worldwide need to adapt the whole system toward a sustainable development and the necessity for a change of mentality is now essential for the natural, social and economical balance (Honey, 2008).

In fact as the entire planet is facing these problems by adopting policies to safeguard environment and people, tourism as well requires new business models that can help on one hand to the enhancement of the economic wellbeing of people and on the other to preserve the natural and social environments; thus the concept of ecolodge fits with these world requirements and a deep analysis will be able to reveal the potential of this type of business under an economic, social and environmental perspective.

The significance of a sustainable tourism diffusion has indeed an increasing prominence and people are becoming more concerned and careful about problems such as pollution, exploitation of environmental resources, social well-being and so on. Moreover tourists seem to be more aware about these problems and the willingness of a more conscious tourism is spreading fast (Muhanna, 2006).

The research aims to analyze and discover whether and how an ecolodge can be considered a sustainable and successful business model and the potential that eco-accommodations have for ameliorating tourism and obtaining economic outcomes while producing both natural and social benefits for local people.

Three research questions listed below are the point of start of this work and the obtained results presented in the conclusive part show whether and in which way such questions are fulfilled.

- Is it possible to create a successful business accommodation (under an economical point of view) by respecting and helping at the same time environment and local population?
- Why do ecolodges have to be considered as a new and suitable type of accommodation for travellers?
- How can a lodge be considered as “eco” and sustainable? Which peculiarities are necessary for a proper implementation?

The first question is the soul of the search as it aims to achieve a complete understanding of how an ecolodge develops and operates in an environment in which nature and the surrounding communities are the predominant factors; the

ecosystem preservation, social wellbeing and economic success (for both the ecolodge and the community) are in fact the main targets that are taken under consideration for this question and for the whole paper itself. With the second question, which is basically a continuation of the first one, is provided an explanation of why an ecolodge has to be categorized as a valuable and wholesome type of accommodation. The last question, thanks to previous research and the results obtained, shows the best methods of implementation that take into account both the practical aspects (construction and operation phases) and the ones related to the integration with local the culture and the ecosystem. This part is practically explained through the business plan in which all these factors are included.

### 1.3 Master thesis plan

This work, containing a theoretical and empirical section, is divided into several parts; initially in the second chapter by using the literature review, definitions of sustainability, ecotourism and more specifically what ecolodges are provided; furthermore explanations about how eco-accommodations generally operate, the importance they have for the surrounding environment and the role of eco-labels are offered. The third chapter deals with the methodology and it explains why a certain type of research method has been chosen. Subsequently the fourth chapter presents various real examples regarding eco-accommodations in different areas of the world that are analyzed with the aim of understanding which elements they have in common and their degree of success (economical, social and environmental).

The fifth chapter contains the questions and the discussion of the interviews that are linked to the literature that has previously been offered. All the respondents are either owning or managing the ecolodges or part of the operations and they give concrete information about their initiatives; interviews, which are structured with several open-ended questions are listed in the appendix and they provide answers from people directly working in the ecotourism field (Marsiglio, 2013). The sixth chapter provides an assessment table that, by taking under consideration different criteria, states which structures (presented in the case studies and interviews) can be considered more eco sustainable. In the seventh chapter some guidelines explaining the best development methods for eco-accommodations are provided through the presentation of the business plan with the main goal of concretely understanding how an ecolodge would work in reality. The decision to prepare a

business plan is due to the author's contribution desire to offer a concrete model based on the previous literature review, case studies and interviews; in other words it is a practical and comprehensive reassessment of all that has been studied and explored.

According to Kothari (2004) this paper is mostly based on descriptive and qualitative research as grand part of the variables and the data obtained cannot be controlled but only described.

The investigation begins with a theoretical methodology prevalently based on literature review, articles and experts findings. Research questions that have been formulated have a first comparison with the theory. Whereupon a part composed by case studies is presented. These selected cases are firstly proposed and explored taking in consideration their socio-economic and environmental peculiarities and then they are linked with the literature; thus this procedure guarantees a first comprehension of the topic.

The open-ended qualitative interviews firstly transcribed and then proposed, likewise to the case studies, with the linkage to the literature review. The quantity and especially the quality of these answers are essential for a proper connection with the precedent literature. The research sample varies depending on the respondents but a large number of managers (mostly) and other experts have been contacted.

The last part regarding the business plan is also performed based on previous knowledge gained. The scientific approach used is the qualitative one and through all these steps the conclusion is able to demonstrate the socio/economic and environmental feasibility of ecolodges through the most effective practices discovered during the research (MacDonald & Headlam, n.d.).

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter is constituted by a theoretical recap of all those concepts linked with sustainability, ecotourism, eco-resort and the importance they have for the surrounding environment. Such concepts are required for the topic comprehension and they are also indispensable for the linkage with the case studies and interviews findings that are offered subsequently.

As stated above all the concepts, theories and definitions are based on experts, professors and companies studies.

### 2.2 What is sustainability and sustainable tourism

Overpopulation, pollution, exploitation of human resources and environmental issues are more and more central and problematic nowadays and one of the biggest goals of our century is to adopt sustainable growth (Business Insider, 2010).

The concept of sustainability is fairly recent since the first studies date back to the late eighties. The main aspect in sustainability is focused on the well-being of future generations and in particular with irreplaceable natural resources as opposed to the satisfaction of present needs (Saarinen, 2006).

The World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 41).

Where 'needs' are meant as the basic necessities, to which it is important give consideration and it is important to note that sustainability is viewed as a long-term concept.

Although it is a relatively new concept, the number of studies, researches and results is very wide and diversified; social, economic and environmental aspects can be considered as the fundamental bases constituting this concept; nevertheless as stated in Gibson (2001), the pillars of this mindset can be two (ecological and socioeconomic), three (ecological, social, economic), or five (ecological, social, economic, cultural, political) depending on the school of thought.

Sustainable development in general goes along with the concept of sustainability which, as stated by Beaumont et al. (and cited in Harris & Leiper 2001) contains three main definitions:

- Not using non-renewable resources faster than the renewable substitutes can be found for them.
- Not using renewable resources faster than they can be replenished.
- Not releasing pollutants faster than the biosphere can process them to be harmless.

(Harris & Leiper, 2001, p. xix).

Hall argues, as cited in Kiper (2013) “Sustainable tourism requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Achieving it requires monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary.” (Kiper, 2013, p. 781).

Only from these necessary actions a destination can perform a correct implementation of a wholesome sustainable businesses model able to guarantee the preservation of the environment and the enhancement of the social wellbeing. Without such structure the risk of social exploitation and territorial abuse is likely to happen especially in countries where policies and laws still need to be structured.

Below (Figure 1) by Bhuiyan et al. (2012), and cited in Kiper (2013), it is possible to visualize how a sustainable tourism pattern can be implemented into a destination through a well-managed ecotourism and regional development. As visible there are plenty of criteria which need to be fulfilled in order to be effective and the efforts behind this progress are greater if compared to a normal touristic destination since stakeholders are more numerous and initiatives require an higher level of involvement.

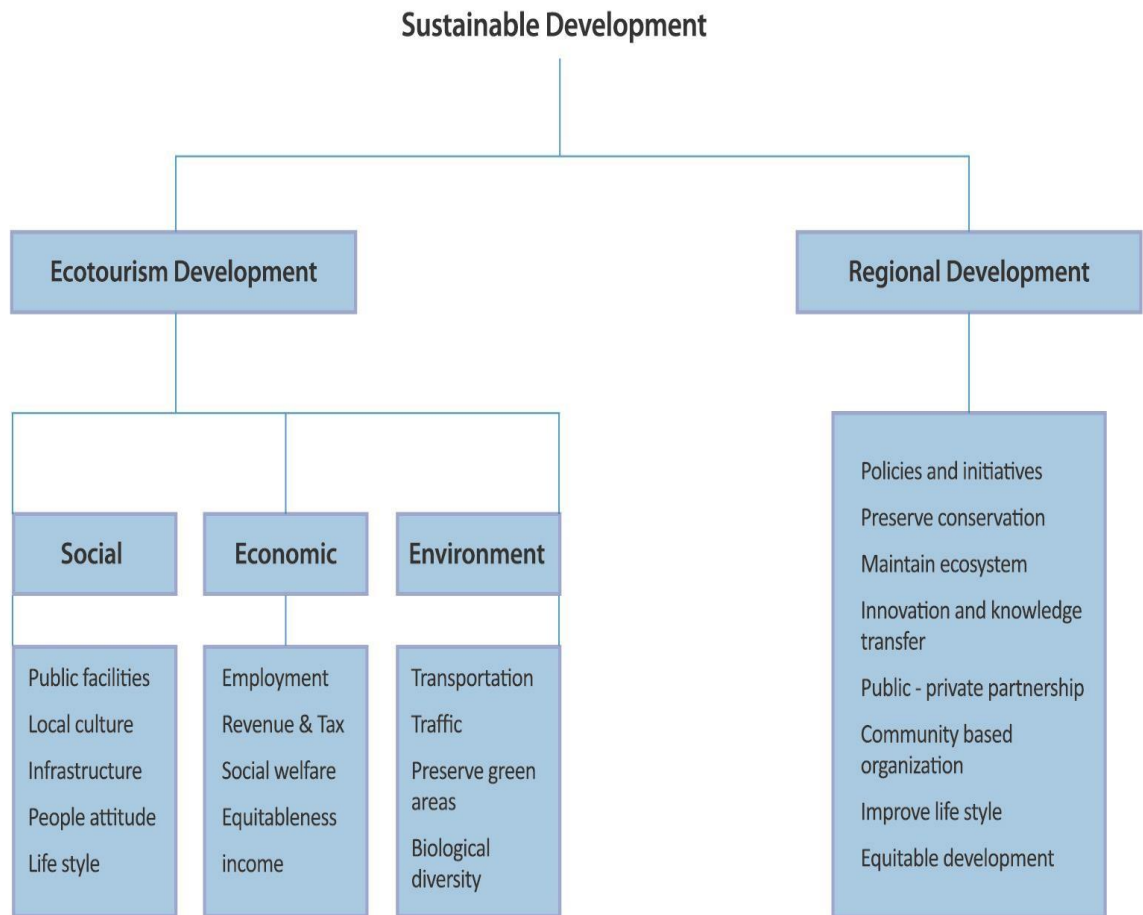


Figure 1: Sustainable development (Bhuiyan et al., 2012, cited in Kiper, 2013)

A serious problem for a proper sustainable development is about the loss of power sovereign states are having in their territories in favour of multinational corporations and other international organizations that very often have the ability to act only according to their interests (Mowforth & Munt, 2009).

## 2.3 What is ecotourism

According to Harris et al. (2002) the continuous and drastic tourism growth during the last decades is dramatically changing cultures and environments that have to fit with tourists needs. This problem is even worse for poorer nations that are more likely to be exploited from multinationals, richer countries and organizations and where there is also the challenge of ensuring environmental protection. Thus a wholesome ecotourism development in certain areas can be used also to mitigate such issue.

Nevertheless the notion of what is luxury is changing, and the interconnection to nature, related to preserved areas and harmonious natural environment is one of the great luxuries nowadays. Another significant concept is that, with increasing importance, economic success is as important as other factors such as energy saving and efficiency , human well-being and harmony with nature preservation (Harris et al., 2002).

Weaver and Lawton (2007) in their article focused on the diffusion of ecotourism concept in the last twenty years, are claiming how ecotourism evolved and spread really fast among researchers, universities and various organizations; moreover the pure concept of ecotourism has developed in different sub-classes, different topics and field of research.

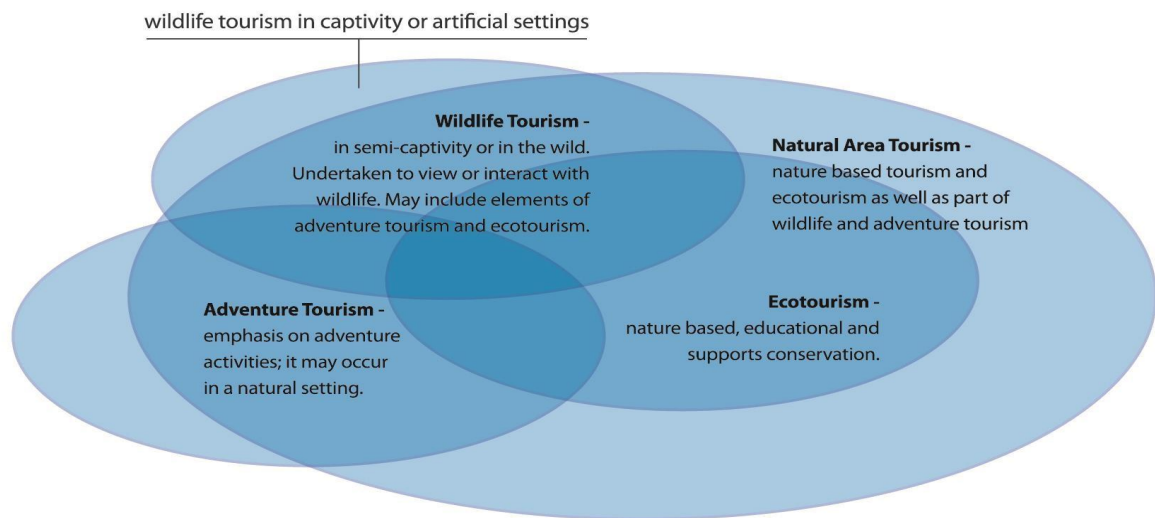
Ecotourism can in fact can be considered as a branch of sustainable tourism as it is generally focused primarily on natural preservation but it also aims to the cultural safeguard and social well-being. Nature-based tourism is also a subclass but it is more focused on natural assets and experiences whereas adventure tourism is predominantly based on adventure in natural areas and wildlife tourism is principally based on interaction with the surrounding wildlife (Kiper, 2013). There are also other forms of sustainable tourism and some of them, such as the pro-poor tourism, are more marked on help and support local communities, especially in developing countries (Harrison & Schipani 2007).

Figure 2 below by Hill and Gale (2009), as cited in Kiper (2013) shows the different groups of sustainable tourism.



## TOURISM

**Mass Tourism** - large numbers of people seeking replication of their own culture in institutionalised settings.



**Alternative Tourism** - forms of tourism generally characterised by small scale sustainable activities.

*Figure 2: Alternative forms of tourism (Hill & Gale, 2009, cited in Kiper, 2013).*

Figure 2 above differentiates the types of sustainable tourism, which are more focused on natural assets; nevertheless, as shown, ecotourism is particularly committed not only on nature, wildlife and ecosystems but it is also focused on the local community enhancement and protection.

Indeed, according to the National Ecotourism Strategy (NES) of the Australian Commonwealth Department of Tourism (1994) and stated in Blamey (1997), ecotourism is defined as “nature-based tourism that involves education and interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable” (Blamey, 1997, p. 110). The NES also acknowledges that being sustainable means to properly involve the local community as well.

In accordance with Honey (2008) ecotourism is often associated with nature-based tourism even though ecotourism goes further, it focuses on both the protection of natural areas and locals wellbeing as well and it is considered the most vastly growing sector of tourism. Moreover she clarifies the differences of nature, wildlife and adventure tourism with ecotourism; if the first mostly aims to visit and enjoy natural areas with some activities, the second one is more focused on local species and the third wants to offer adventurous experiences; they all propose recreational practices whereas ecotourism goal is to include benefits to environmental preservation and local people enhancement.

Over the years one of the most problematic agreement among researchers has been about the definition of ecotourism which was based on many different concepts; however nowadays one of the most near-consensus definitions was given, as cited in Weaver and Lawton (2007), by Blamey who defined ecotourism as a practice that needs to fulfill three important criteria. Firstly destination attractions should be mostly nature-based, secondly visitor interactions with those attractions should be focused on learning or education about the local community culture and natural environment, and thirdly experiences should follow principles and practices mostly based on ecological, socio-cultural and economic sustainability.

Another important explanation is provided by The International Ecotourism Society (2015) where ecotourism is defined as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education".

As inferable from these two definitions, which can be taken as clear guidelines, the main concepts around ecotourism are always focused on the three principles referred to natural protection, social and cultural welfare and economical sustainability that can be considered as the pillars of this field of research.

More specifically the main principles for an authentic ecotourism and listed by TIES (2015) are:

- Minimize physical, social, behavioural, and psychological impacts.
- Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect.
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts.
- Provide direct financial benefits for conservation.
- Generate financial benefits for both local people and private industry.
- Deliver memorable interpretative experiences to visitors that help raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climates.
- Design, construct and operate low-impact facilities.
- Recognize the rights and spiritual beliefs of the Indigenous people in your community and work in partnership with them to create empowerment.

(TIES, 2015).

However, and especially in recent years, the concept of ecotourism has been linked more and more to the need for an environmental and social commitment for the simple fact that directly or indirectly in any destination tourists impact both the

nature and the local society that are supposed to be preserved and helped. In other words, ecotourism has the role of enhancing and supporting the community through a well-managed use and preservation of the natural beauties available in the destination (Weaver & Lawton, 2007).

Another important aspect, useful for this research, and stated in Accot et al. (1998) emphasizes the differences between shallow and deep ecotourism.

Shallow ecotourism relies on a normal relationship among nature and humans where the first one is seen as only a resource which can easily be used and exploited from the seconds in order to maximize their economic benefits. In this case that the decisions are taken using an anthropocentric method which is strictly related to the centric human conditions in respect the surrounding environment. On the other hand deep ecotourism in fact is predominantly focused on deep ecology and ecocentrism ideals therefore, in other words, deep ecotourism main concepts are mainly based on the important value of nature, small-scale community identity and active participation, a refusal to accept large-scale technologies and also a refusal to see the business as a tool for personal enrichment. The development of bioethic and ecocentrism concepts are strictly connected to ecotourism (Accot et al., 1998).

## 2.4 What is an ecolodge and how it works

As stated in The International Finance Corporation (2004) "Ecolodges are of particular interest to the sustainable development community, because they are small, medium and microenterprises that can generate a variety of positive economic development impacts in highly rural, biodiverse areas, where other types of development underway or under consideration are frequently damaging to the environment" (The International Finance Corporation, 2004, p. 4).

As stated in TIES the concept behind ecolodges (or eco-resorts) is relatively new and it can be shortly defined as sustainable accommodation integrated with the natural and social environment and its goal is to reduce its carbon footprint while giving back welfare to the local community. In theory, ecolodges create jobs and promote sustainable development for the community from an environmental, cultural and economic point of view.

In other words an ecolodge can be generally classified as an accommodation that follows the concept of ecotourism (TIES, 2015).

Generally speaking below are listed some important characteristics and criteria that ecolodges should practice in order to be considered authentic.

- Provide comfortable rooms and common areas that reflect local design and heritage.
- Offer a natural setting that has been carefully preserved retaining indigenous landscaping.
- Use local, sustainably harvested and/or recycled building materials.
- Purchase foodstuffs from local farmers, ranchers and fishermen.
- Use renewable energy and environmentally sensitive water and waste disposal systems.
- Employ and train local workers.
- Offer a variety of excursions and educational materials to natural and cultural sites.
- Support and be supported by the local community and businesses.

(ECO-RESORTS, 2010).

One of the differences of ecolodges, unlike the normal accommodations, is that they offer the opportunity for travellers to have responsible and constructive experiences.

These activities offered are in fact addressed to the well-being of customers stay and at the same time they aim to create awareness about issues and themes such as the preservation and knowledge of that particular habitat, education and integration with the local population and so on.

Eco-accommodations can be, in other words, considered as a holistic experience within the whole surrounding social, cultural and natural environment that is able to offer teaching, knowledge and new perspectives to guests.

The differentiation amongst ecolodges is very wide and it can range from nature or education based travel to adventure travel, from mountain climbing to activities based on regional history and wildlife. The most important factors, once again, must be the preservation and enhancing of the whole natural environment and local community that have a privileged position over economic benefits (TIES, 2015).

Drumm & Moore (2002), as cited in Kiper (2013), show the necessary steps needed for implementing ecotourism into a touristic destination; these phases which are generally intended for ecotourism can also be used and considered as necessary,

in reduced scale, for ecolodges as the principles they need to follow are the same. Below (Figure 3) are shown all those steps.



*Figure 3: Ecotourism development (Drumm & Moore, 2002, cited in Kiper, 2013).*

As can be seen above in fact the planning phase has to follow and respect certain criteria. Partnerships have to be made mostly with the local population that have the right to directly participate in the business and operate within the ecolodge in many different ways; in fact locals are expected to provide the raw materials, they should be hired and work in the available positions, educate tourists about their culture and their natural environment. Thanks to such involvement the local community is likely to benefit under an economical and financial point of view and so the accommodation itself will prosper. Moreover, as stated in The International Finance Corporation (2004) one of the most successful factors necessary for a proper implementation of an eco-resort is the constant and trustable relationship that has to be formed between public and private sector.

As already mentioned the protection of natural areas, training and education are also fundamental aspects for ecolodges. In regards to environmental preservation,

these businesses should be built close to impact-zero for the nature, but they also have to have the goal of defending the biodiversity. Training and education in this case are meant for both locals and tourists; the first ones in fact have the possibility to gain knowledge and expertise by working for and with the ecolodge and tourists have the chance to learn from the local population about the surrounding environment and culture.

Once all these important features are understood and implemented in the right way, the ecolodge can be considered successful and sustainable and whether the whole touristic destination is able to follow the same principle by creating a healthy and fair network of cooperation, the region itself can reach a sustainable development (Kiper, 2013).

## 2.5 Importance for social and natural environment

In recent years many different studies, conducted especially in less developed countries and focused on the benefits produced by tourism in their communities, showed how such process is able to bring welfare into the area and at same time offer economic outcomes to the entrepreneurs.

As stated in Harrison & Schipani (2007) on field studies conducted in Uganda, South Africa, Caribbean and other countries, showed benefits and sometimes limitations when private companies collaborate with local population; overall the process demonstrates how enterprises can get benefits out of locals collaboration in economic terms and vice-versa as such businesses are able to provide work by directly hiring natives, asking them for raw materials, primary goods and so on. Community-based tourism has also been categorized as a successful economic model principally for the local population that, through tourism, is able to enhance its social well-being while simultaneously preserving the ecosystem.

Eco-businesses can obtain certifications, eco-labels and possible financing only whether a project is considered truly environmental friendly and it is able to ensure a certain attention and diligence for the preservation and the improvement of the territory. Thus the whole process required for achieving these targets is more difficult but once it is done in the proper way benefits are evident. Eco-labels are different from country to country and depending on the grade of importance given to ecotourism they can be more or less strict but still they aim to the overall preservation and whole environment wellbeing (Harrison & Schipani, 2007).

The book written by TIES about "Sustainable Tourism & the Millennium Development Goals" describes some important aims that have been set by the UN

Millennium Declaration and must be achieved by the end of 2015. Tourism plays a central role for reaching these goals that are eight and are also listed in their web site.

- Goal 1: Eradicate Extreme Hunger and Poverty
- Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education
- Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women
- Goal 4: Reduce Child Mortality
- Goal 5: Improve Maternal Health
- Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases
- Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability
- Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development

(TIES, 2015).

The book discusses the big potential that ecotourism has on enhancing social well-being and environmental preservation and ecolodges would also be able to provide some interesting solutions, in their micro realities, at least to some of these issues (TIES, 2015).

Some examples of successful ecolodges can be found around the world; for instance Seven Spirit Bay is an eco-resort situated in the northern part of Australia and according to Harris & Leiper (2001) the value in terms of social and environmental sustainability of this accommodation has to be taken in consideration (and it is also analyzed in-depth as one of the case studies). The Aboriginal inhabitants are in fact directly involved in the business operations where they have the chance to develop working knowledge meanwhile they preserve their culture, traditions and the surrounding ecosystem.

Hunt et al. (2014) in their article "Can ecotourism deliver real economic, social, and environmental benefits? A study of the Osa Peninsula, Costa Rica" explain the benefits that ecotourism in Osa Peninsula brings to the people and the environment. As stated in their article the main questions of the research were dealing whether ecotourism offers a higher quality of life to people than existing alternatives in the area and how beneficial is ecotourism in the region under the economic, social, and environmental perspective.

Costa Rica has more than 200 certified hotels, 19 of them in the Osa Peninsula region where the local economy is mostly composed by small-scale nature-based tourism and certified by ICT (Costa Rican Institute for Tourism); ICT is also

responsible for other sustainable certification programs for beaches, tour operators, tourist attractions and so on (Hunt et al., 2014). Their analysis focused on interviews from seventy ecotourism employees and fifty-eight local residents working in other sectors, and results were totally supporting the initial idea that ecotourism is more beneficial for the local economy, environment and social welfare than other sectors. Results were outstanding in fact as "Tourism workers' monthly individual income is nearly twice as high as those of workers not in the tourism industry US\$709.70 vs. US\$357.12" (Hunt et al., 2015, p. 346). Moreover, many environmental and social benefits were found as "Many of the ecolodges in our sample provide funds to their local communities for conservation and development needs. Several lodges in Drake's Bay, for example, contribute to the Fundacion Corcovado, which provides annual contributions to local development funds, bolsters environmental education curriculum in local schools, promotes recycling in the community" (Hunt et al., 2015, p. 350).

These two significant cases are important to clarify the high potential of ecolodges and to make clear that, under given circumstances and with stark but at the same time effective criteria, it is possible to create an environment where economical benefits fit with respectfulness and preservation of natural habitat and social welfare.

These features and many others will be analyzed during this research and thanks to the provided literature and examples will be possible to have a better understanding of the whole mechanism, process and result.

Nevertheless, ecotourism has its own problems and challenges. First of all, as ecotourism is a niche market where many criteria have to be followed and the guidelines necessary for a proper implementation are more harsh; moreover policies and regulations play a central role and political institutions as well are very influential for the final result.

Nevertheless, according to Buckley's observations and cited by Zambrano (2010) "(1) in many developing nations, ecotourism compensates for shortfalls in governmental regulation by providing private funds for the protection of natural areas and that (2) by providing alternative economic opportunities to local people, natural resource demands and environmental degradation may be reduced in the first place" (Zambrano et al., 2010, pp. 79-80).

Moreover, in another study also performed in Osa Peninsula in Costa Rica results show that the rate of reforestation around the adjacent communities to ecotourism activities (most of the times ecolodges or eco-resorts) was greater than compared to communities distant from such activities (Zambrano et al., 2010).



In her article, Dujon (1999) argues that the success of ecotourism strategies mostly depends on the ability to recognize and realize the impact of using and exploiting natural and social resources and then to create appropriate long-term plans and strategies to ensure ecological and economic sustainability. That is exactly one of the biggest problems ecolodges face on, as the differentiated and heterogeneous environment they have to deal with has to be taken under serious consideration in all the aspects. She also points out that territorial size and ownership of resources can be of primary importance for the effectiveness of the various tourism companies. In other words the more resources are controlled by the same person or group of people the more difficult will be the implementation of the business in that given area.

## 2.6 The role of eco labels

Ecotourism and consequently organizations who practice ecotourism work and have the commitment, at least theoretically, to preserve natural areas in which they operate and to assist the local population. However, these obligations are not always fulfilled, and in some cases the businesses operate differently than the pre-set or simply do not care about the environmental and social situation; therefore certifications can be an effective tool in understanding whether ecotourism activity is properly carried out in order to reward those who operate correctly and responsibly, and punish those who perform badly (Center for Ecotourism and Sustainable Development, 2008).

According to LEONARDO DA VINCI PROGRAMME (n.d.) nowadays there are approximately hundred eco-labels worldwide, most of them used in Europe and more specifically in Germany which are mostly focused on sustainable tourism especially in regard accommodations; despite this wide number of labels and certifications not all of them offer a concrete help to ecotourism, thus it is important to recognize and reward only those that operate with a real social, environmental and economic commitment. Most of them put more emphasis on the natural aspect whereas others are focused on all the three sustainability pillars even though the guidelines imposed are not effective enough to consider them reliable.

For these reasons in order to contrast the increasing number of labels and certifications that were expanding excessively and causing confusion among the consumers and the industry itself, in 2000 near New York the most important ecotourism and sustainable tourism certification programmes and adepts met for developing the Mohonk Agreement which sets the minimum criteria and rules that

must be followed in order to ensure a proper ecotourism evolution (Center for Ecotourism and Sustainable Development, 2008).

According to the Mohonk Agreement (2000) such guidelines contain a “basis of scheme”, a “criteria framework” and a “scheme integrity”, necessary for a proper development and measurement where “the development of a certification scheme should be a participatory, multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral process (including representatives from local communities, tourism businesses, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, government, and others)” (Mohonk Agreement, 2000, p. 97).

More specifically the predominant criteria and steps for a correct ecolabel implementation are listed below.

#### Basis of scheme

- The scheme should provide tangible benefits to tourism providers and a means for tourists to choose wisely.
- The scheme should provide tangible benefits to local communities and to conservation.
- The scheme should set minimum standards while encouraging and rewarding best practice.
- There is a process to withdraw certification in the event of non-compliance.
- The scheme should establish control of existing/new seals/logos in terms of appropriate use, an expiration date and, in the event of loss of certification, withdrawal 97.
- The scheme should include provisions for technical assistance.
- The scheme should be designed such that there is motivation for continual improvement—both of the scheme and of the products/companies to be certified.

#### Criteria Framework

- Criteria should provide the mechanism(s) to meet the stated objective(s).
- Criteria used should meet and preferably exceed regulatory compliance.
- Criteria should embody global best practice environmental, social and economic management.
- Criteria should be adapted to recognizing local/regional ecological, social and economic conditions and local sustainable development efforts.

- Criteria should be subject to a periodic review.
- Criteria should be principally performance-based and include environmental, social and economic management process elements.

#### Scheme Integrity

- The certification program should be transparent and involve an appeals process
- The certification body should be independent of the parties being certified and of technical assistance and assessment bodies (i.e., administrative structures for technical assistance, assessment and auditing should avoid conflicts of interest)
- The scheme should require audits by suitably trained auditors
- The scheme should require mechanisms for consumer and local community feedback

(Mohonk Agreement, 2000, pp. 97/98).

This agreement, as visible, is not mandatory but it can be an interesting tool able to provide answers on whether an ecolabel or certification is actually trustable and capable to offer real eco guarantees; furthermore all these criteria are rather in line with the general concepts of ecotourism and thus ecolodges since they aim to create and preserve a wholesome model where all the parts play an important role in the economic, environmental and social enhancement.

Benefits from proper certifications, as stated in Bien (2008), are plenty as they are able to: decrease long-run operational costs as labels require the use of renewable resources, ensure an easier access to financing and a market advantage over competitors, provide a stronger customer confidence, increase the customer's experience and awareness on environmental and social issues, offer environmental and social protection and enhancement in the long-run.

A practical example showing the importance of certifications when properly implemented is offered by Muriithi (2013); the research provides the benefits gained through eco certifications existing since 2003 in Kenyan communities. The main findings indicate that, when well developed, eco-rating increases the local population well-being and simultaneously their commitment for a better environmental preservation; in fact it is shown that a strong correlation between local community welfare and natural conservation exists. Especially ecolodges that

really follow eco-certification criteria have the power to create a more favourable situation in the area and offer more job positions in different fields, thus enhance the social, economical and environmental factors.

## 3 Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

The chosen methodology, follows a qualitative approach which as stated in Kothari (2004) “is concerned with subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behaviour. Research in such a situation is a function of researcher’s insights and impressions. Such an approach to research generates results either in non-quantitative form or in the form which are not subjected to rigorous quantitative analysis. Generally, the techniques of focus group interviews, projective techniques and depth interviews are used.” (Kothari 2004, p. 5). As stated in the introduction chapter, the research method is structured in a way that the research questions find answers when the first deep theoretical analysis (literature review) is linked and examined with the collected data (case studies and interviews). According to Kothari (2004) this paper attempts to analyze factors and arguments that cannot be managed but rather, they can be explained and somehow measured in a subjective way, thus the research can also be considered as a descriptive one especially with regards to the literature, case studies and interviews. The decision to use this methodology can be explained and contextualized to the inner nature of this work which is mostly focused on concepts, descriptions, and qualitative information. Moreover the data, considering the field of ecotourism and ecolodges, must follow a qualitative approach in order to gain valuable notions as the topic is rather broad.

It is important to state that for the whole research the three pillars that are taken under consideration until the conclusion are the economic, social and environmental aspects since they are able to state whether an ecolodge is a sustainable and wholesome business model.

Considering these prerogatives it is inferable that the qualitative method is the most suitable one also according to MacDonald & Headlam (n.d.) as it relies on complete description of observations, it aims to understand and interpret the context, it uses a rather small sample of cases and respondents and it is interpretative.

### 3.2 Literature review

Concerning this part, it has to be considered that this is the first deep author’s approach to ecotourism and more specifically to the ecolodges theme. Indeed all the information searched and proposed in this section come from researches and theoretical sources from divers prior studies and investigations. Without a strong

theoretical background it would not be possible to gain a proper and holistic knowledge on sustainable tourism dynamics and thus the final outcome would be inconsistent. The theoretical research that proceeds is linked with the author's findings through all the paper.

As this research aims to figure out whether and how proper ecolodges work, right below are listed, again, the main research questions:

- Is it possible to create a successful accommodation (under an economical point of view) by respecting and helping at the same time environment and local population?
- Why do ecolodges have to be considered as a new and suitable type of accommodation for travellers?
- How can a lodge be considered as “eco” and sustainable? Which peculiarities are necessary for a proper implementation?

### 3.3 Case studies

The eight selected case studies, have been carefully chosen following precise criteria; as mentioned in the introduction above, the predominant aspects within the analyzed cases are the environmental, social and economic ones. It should also be made clear that some cases are more focused on one of these factors, while others discuss all three in the same way, but in any case they are centered on practices related to ecotourism and sustainability.

To be more specific these ecolodges and eco-resorts have been selected from different countries and they all have different backgrounds in order to obtain an heterogeneous perspective. The cases vary among individual eco-resorts and more extensive realities such as regional based analysis and some of them are privately managed businesses whereas others are chains or community-based enterprises; the main goal is to find and understand their success or failure within the surrounding environment under the environmental, social and economic point of view. It is finally important to state that the selected case studies analysis is not carried on only to consider their success (or failure) within the area where they are operating, rather they also offer principles and criteria that can offer positive outcomes worldwide, if well implemented (IUCN Business and Biodiversity Programme, 2012).

The first five case studies are based on five different standards stated in “Siting and Design of Hotels and Resorts. Principles and Case Studies for Biodiversity Conservation” by IUCN Business and Biodiversity Programme (2012).

This document provides five principles based on construction and operational phases through a various number of eco-accommodation cases which are differentiated for each of the five theoretical contexts that are offered. Such principles are:

- Adopt an ecosystem-based approach in tourism development planning.
- Manage impacts on biodiversity from hotel development and attempt to achieve an overall positive contribution.
- Design with nature and adopt nature based solutions.
- Respect, involve and support local communities.
- Build collaboration among stakeholders.

IUCN Business and Biodiversity Programme (2012).

The other three cases have been picked up following the same heterogeneous but at the same time sustainability-base structure.

The books used for the cases study were “INTERNATIONAL CASE STUDIES IN SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL & TOURISM” by Benckendorff. P. & Lund-Durlacher. D., (2013) and in “SUSTAINABLE TOURISM. AN AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTIVE” by Harris. R. & Leiper. N., (2001) and the last source was “Surama Village Eco-lodge, Guyana: Merging Traditional and Modern Approaches to Preserve Biodiversity and Create Sustainable Livelihoods. Small Planet Consulting” by Karwacki. J. (n.d.).

### 3.4 Interviews

Regarding the interviews, a total of twenty-three between eco-resorts, ecolodges and ecotourism organizations were initially contacted via e-mail; like the case studies, the choice was based on structures with predominantly focuses on environmental, social and economic sustainability.

After this research nine of them answered back showing an initial interest to help and at the end a total of four open-ended questions interviews were made to ecolodges located in Papua New Guinea, the Caribbean, Peru and Costa Rica; another ecolodge in Portugal answered even though the notions were not in line with the interview questions but it was a summary of some practices adopted. Therefore the general response rate is of 21.7%.

It was decided to conduct open-ended questions to participants because, since this paper is based on a still unexplored and huge field, the importance of having concrete and exhaustive answers from skilled and experienced people has a

primarily role. Questionnaires were not considered as suitable way because results would have been general and approximate. Questions aim to understand which are the main characteristics that make these kind of resorts as eco, how they work in the whole environment and so they provide a specific overview of the whole process (Kothari, 2004).



## 4 Case studies

### 4.1 Case studies analysis

#### **Chumbe Ecolodge, Tanzania**

*Adopt an ecosystem-based approach in tourism development planning*

##### BACKGROUND

According to IUCN Business and Biodiversity Programme (2012), Chumbe Island is a small island of just 25 hectares situated 12 km southwest of Zanzibar, Tanzania in the middle-eastern part of Africa. In Chumbe island, with its prosperous forest, coastal and marine biodiversity, between 1993 and 1998 has been developed Chumbe Ecolodge, a small accommodation with only seven guest bungalows and the associated facilities.

The natural environment is the point of strength of this uncontaminated island and both the forest and the surrounding marine species are rather diversified. Also the presence of Chumbe's coral reef which is home for about 90 percent of East Africa's hard coral species and 424 species of fish is meaningful in order to understand the beauty and at the same time fragility of this environment that was developed in a really sustainable way.

In 1991 in fact an entrepreneur prepared a business plan for lease and manage privately this island as a Marine Protected Area (MPA), financed through ecotourism. The plan was presented to the Government of Zanzibar and one year later the Chumbe Island Coral Park Ltd (CHICOP) was founded. The agreement among the government and the company was initially to lease 2.44 ha for a period of 33 years and after some years it has been extended to other protected areas for a total of 22 ha.

##### ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECT

CHICOP was immediately aware about the need of biodiversity conservation not just in the touristic site but also for the whole surrounding environment and, although the lack of regulations and rules at that period, CHICOP started first to discuss with the government to set regulatory frameworks and agreements. Some of them are stated below:

- Minimize the impact with indigenous flora and fauna;
- Prohibition for cutting old trees and the cutting of other trees was accepted only for the size of the construction site.

- Raw building materials had necessarily be taken outside the island and the only exception was for the soil excavation for the foundations.
- Exotic plant species were forbidden and also a natural tidal pool could not be transformed.
- No sewage was to be dumped into the sea.
- A further condition of the lease was that CHICOP should report annually the level of marine and terrestrial environment conservation, including reference to problems encountered and steps taken to resolve them.

Chumbe Island became the first Marine Protected Area (MPA) in Tanzania and others were opened in the next years; it can be considered as a really successful example of private/public collaboration. Other important aspects are the management plans prepared and monitoring arrangements of the whole area.

In 1995 and 2006 CHICOP prepared a ten year management plan regarding the MPA and the whole island and the approval was assured by an Advisory Committee of stakeholders, including people from the government, a university, local communities and CHICOP itself. The most important actions where the establishment of a species conservation strategy and constant update of new innovations and technologies which was monitored by the park rangers employed by CHICOP, volunteers and visiting researchers.

Monitoring is and has been done steadily because the results obtained are able to guarantee whether the conservation is actually effective and moreover whether new regulations or in general support is needed.

Accommodation design close to zero impact was taken under serious consideration and developers used innovative technologies based on simple forms, only traditional construction methods and available materials (mostly coming from Zanzibar) and the competences of local labour. From the shell roof shape for collecting easily the rainwater to eco-technologies which ensure each unit to be self-sufficient and generate its own water and energy supply and the use of dry composting toilets which avoid any sewage, the commitment for the natural preservation was clearly the most important goal.

#### SOCIO/ECONOMIC ASPECT

Economically speaking, the total investment cost was about US\$1.2 million and only 39% was directed to tourism infrastructure whereas the remaining 61% was mostly used for research and park management and environmental education

programs addressed to local schools. One-third of the 43 employees are primarily working in conservation management and education initiatives. Commercial operations started in 1998, and revenues has increased steadily.

## DISCUSSION

This initial case study is particularly able to give many clarifications and guidelines about the best sustainable development planning practices; this island is an example of a good cooperation among private and public sector and it demonstrates that it is possible to run a wholesome business model through the preservation of the natural habitat. Although the natural aspect is considered the most important factor in this case, the local community also benefits from this business by working to preserve the area and providing cultural experiences to locals and foreigner guests.

### **Isla Palenque, Panamá**

*Manage impacts on biodiversity from hotel development and attempt to achieve an overall positive contribution.*

## BACKGROUND

According to IUCN Business and Biodiversity Programme (2012) this resort, situated on the homonymous island of almost 2 sq. km lying off the Pacific coast of Panama, was opened in the beginning of 2013 with 16 units and it is supposed to extend in the next years. This island, which was purchased in 2008 by Amble Resorts, has a wide number of habitats and species including primary forest, mangrove, marshes and twelve sandy beaches.

Amble Resorts goal was to create a particular travel experience through the island conservation and it offered a detailed master plan dedicated on environmental and cultural information, a framework for coastal access, transport, development, energy, open space and conservation; this plan expected more than half of the island as protected natural sanctuary. Considering that for the Panamanian law in this cases is enough to ensure a 15 percent of land protection, it is inferable the carefulness given by the hotel to the environment.

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECT

The project itself was really focused on the respect of the surrounding environment in different ways:

- Developers located new buildings on land with limited biodiversity value.
- Ridgelines have been preserved, and buildings are implemented into the landscape to reduce visual impact.
- Buildings have been positioned for using the least portion of land possible by keeping old trees in place, and to benefit from natural breezes and shade.
- Canopy homes are elevated and connected by raised boardwalks which offer ocean views while preserving the surrounding environment.
- Amble Resorts obtained a special approval for reducing for the 50% the wideness of the road.
- Motorized transportation are allowed only for some small electric vehicles.

Amble has also designed, in order to minimize food and raw materials use on the island, an agriculture and forestry programme with the creation of an organic orchard, an edible forest garden and the scattered planting of fruit trees. The use of native plants ensures lower use of water and moreover wastewater treatment and cisterns guarantee enough water for irrigation during the dry season.

Other initiatives for the sustainable enhancement of Isla Palenque have been made; for instance thanks to rainwater harvesting techniques reduces the dependency on aqueduct water. Inverted roofs, collection cisterns and towers in fact are part of the architectural structure for that reason. A big part of the energy is also furnished by the solar panels and wind power. Every building has been designed and built with the standard rules of the U.S. Green Building Council's certification.

## DISCUSSION

This example clarifies how to create a proper business through a wise development and conservation of the surrounding natural environment. Amble resort was in fact able to realize a close to zero-impact resort in a natural paradise that is constantly protected and preserved.

Under and financial and environmental point of view it can be considered successful whereas the social aspect was not considered in the case study; nevertheless in Sustainability in Isla Palenque (2016) is stated that the resort hires local people and in general it supports the local economy through sustainable cultural, economical, health and safety practices.

The main risk for the future of this island is primarily given by the hotel's future operations which aim to extend the number of accommodation from the actual sixteen to around 200 vacation homes and 50 hotel rooms in the next 10 years; this excessive growth risks to overload the island environmental capacity and if not well managed it will exploit the whole zone really quickly.

### **Soneva Fushi, Maldives**

*Design with nature and adopt nature based solutions*

#### **BACKGROUND**

As stated in IUCN Business and Biodiversity Programme (2012) Soneva Fushi with its sixty-five villas has been developed in 1995 in one of Maldives tropical island which has been classified a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve; this tropical island is surrounded by a coral reef and a numerous marine life. The Sonevas is a resort management and development company strongly committed and focused on sustainable development and environmental carefulness; the luxury resort in fact was built by following corporate sustainability policy in both design and construction phase with the main aim of minimizing the environmental impact.

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECT**

In regards to the design phase, mandatory requirements were about the local environment and possible risks, the buildings design, energy management, water supply and water-waste management while the construction phase is related to waste management (during construction), groundwater defense and an environmental monitoring prior to construction on delicate areas. Such sustainable obligations are reflected on the resort that followed these guidelines;

- The villas were manmade constructed 30-40 meters back from the beach, hidden by vegetation for minimizing their visual impact and their design was decided to be integrated with the vegetation (some of them have trees internally their structure).
- Vegetation has been left basically unaffected and the use of natural material was mandatory; for instance recycled timber, teak, cedar, eucalyptus, coconut palm and bamboo coming from sustainable and certified sources.

- Private saltwater swimming pools were built in order to save energy and fresh water.
- In 2009 a first 70kw solar photovoltaic system 70kw was introduced.
- No exogenous species have been introduced for preserving the natural habitat.
- Permaculture was adopted for increasing the production of resources while decreasing the exploitation of the environment.
- Soil content has also been improved by using biocharcoal for augmenting the soil fertility.

## SOCIO/CULTURAL ASPECT

This example is mostly focused on the natural environment but also under a social and cultural point of view the resort seems to be concerned. According to their website infact there are in fact many cultural activities proposed for guests which include for instance a trip to the Kudarikilu island museum, ancestral dinner, Maldivian cooking class, sustainable fishing and much more (Soneva Fushi, 2016). Also employees and stakeholders are part of the local community, providing their knowledge, skills and products to the resort.

## DISCUSSION

This resort was able to combine luxury with sustainability in a very intelligent way; in fact the environmental impact seems to be very low and the interesting things are all the technological improvements that have been implemented over the years.

Such improvements have made the resort even more sustainable from the environmental perspective and moreover they show the importance that the company gives to the ecosystem. Without such commitment it would be very difficult to preserve the island and as a result would be a much more possible a reckless use of resources.

The biggest problems could arise if, as this is a luxury resort, new unsustainable comforts are introduced or the number of houses extended but according to the philosophy of this company such scenario is not likely to happen.

Under a cultural and social point of view this case study is not exhaustive but as stated in the beginning the first five cases are based on different principles which do not necessarily need to be interrelated but rather they are able to give an overall interesting knowledge about a proper implementation.

## **Campi ya Kanzi, Kenya**

*Respect, involve and support local communities*

### **BACKGROUND**

According to IUCN Business and Biodiversity Programme (2012) this case study moves on a different aspect comparing to the previous three which were mostly focused on a proper eco sustainable implementation and environmental management. Here in fact the most important aspect is about the preservation and enhancement of a local African tribe, the Maasai. Kuku Group Ranch is located in Kenya, between Amboseli and Tsavo National Parks arriving until the base of Kilimanjaro and it covers more than 473 sq. km. The landscape is mostly composed by savannah, grasslands and forest on higher ground and the wildlife is really rich and diversified.

As mentioned previously the entire project goes around Maasai, a really traditional tribe living in this area; culturally speaking they are a semi-nomadic community based on pastoral lifestyle. An important aspect for Maasai is their attachment to the natural environment that is also the main touristic attraction in the area. Therefore is important for the Maasai people to protect their area while gaining economic benefits out of it.

For these reasons the main goal of Campi ya Kanzi, built and owned by the community itself, is to preserve the Kuku Group Ranch through the Maasai community which can protect their cultural heritage, wildlife and nature.

The project is based on long-term sustainable development based on a relationship of trustiness, transparency with the Maasai and no hidden conditions for them.

The investors on the other hand financed the construction of the lodge and hold a management contract for the land surrounding the accommodation.

The initial steps was focused on finding the best solutions and the main aspects were:

- The involvement of every influencing person in the community, especially chiefs and elders as well as the set of elected officials in the discussion.
- Trust was built over the time with many meetings in a period of six months.
- Make them realize the importance of risks and gains; the investors in fact were taking the risks and accepting the liabilities associated with the lodge in both development and operational phases. Nevertheless the Maasai had to consider and understand the effect on their future and accept strangers.

The outcome of this long discussion was a partnership based on a twenty-year management contract for the investors whereas ownership stayed with the Maasai members of the Kuku Group Ranch.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECT

The environmental commitment was also fundamental as natural preservation obtained a huge importance in the construction phase. There are infact six tented cottages and two suites and a private villa mainly built of stone, canvas and wood which were developed with zero-impact standards; no soil was took off and no trees were cut. The lodge uses solar power energy, treats greywater and blackwater using anaerobic reaction and filtration, and uses only water that is harvested from rainwater. Water in this area is indeed the most important resource and they implemented a rainwater catchment system covering an area of 7,000 sq. mt and a roof harvesting system. Campi ya Kanzi is entirely independent of community sources of water. Finally is important to state that, at the date of publication of this case study, more than 50 sq. km of land have become conservation zones.

#### SOCIO/ECONOMIC ASPECT

Social commitment was mandatory as firstly all the buildings were constructed by local Maasai, adopting their own techniques; 90 percent of the 65 Kenyan employees are Maasai including guides and trackers.

In 2000 the Maasai Wilderness Conservation Trust (MWCT) was created for ensure an higher preservation of the community and the ecosystem through the partnership with other conservation organisations and the president is a Maasai leader. Trust gets funds for fifteen percent by a daily tax at Campi ya Kanzi paid by guests and the rest comes from fundraising. This organisation counts more than 200 local people in different areas such as conservation, education and health programs. Moreover three times every year meetings are held in order to be always aware about the situation and understand whether there are problems.

#### DISCUSSION

This case study is an exhaustive example on how, through a wholesome partnership among local population and private sector, it is possible to help and enhance the locals well-being and to defend the natural environment. The numbers infact are rather relevant as 65 Kenyans work for the lodge, 200 are hired at Maasai



Wilderness Conservation Trust and naturally speaking the commitment for the ecosystem plays a role of primary importance for the Maasais and so for the business itself. Without such initiative is difficult to think about any other project that would have brought simultaneously all these benefits to all these people and to the natural environment. As Maasai are really attached to their culture and land, possible problems may arise whether such business practices would increase in other zones with other accommodations, causing an overutilization of the local people culture and traditions and the environment. Without this pessimistic scenario and according to the present and the information collected this business model has to be considered positive and successful under the economic, social and environmental point of view.

### **El Nido and Taytay, Philippines**

*Build collaboration among stakeholders*

#### **BACKGROUND**

As reported in IUCN Business and Biodiversity Programme (2012) this case analyses how a collaborative partnership among stakeholders, organisations, private sector developers, NGOs and local community is able to offer a solid structure for the development and protection of the territory and the local community.

This partnership, started in 1990 in the northern part of Palawan island, in the Philippines between two municipalities of El Nido and Taytay, includes a total of four resorts. The ecosystems of this region are rather uncontaminated with the coastal and marine environment hosting 379 species of corals and numerous sea grasses and mangroves and more than 100 species of birds in the area of El Nido.

The first cooperations started in the 1980 among private and public sector with the common objective of a sustainable tourism development. The main stakeholders that over the time participated at this initiative are:

- The national Department of Environment and Natural Resources, which enforces national legislation.
- The provincial government of Palawan which oversees the implementation of the Strategic Environmental Plan and supports various projects.

- The two municipalities of El Nido and Taytay .
- A number of barangays (village councils), representing local communities.
- Conservation NGOs, in particular WWF-Philippines, who have provided conservation expertise and support.

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECT

El Nido Resorts played an important role emphasizing the importance for the conservation of the marine ecosystem and for enhancing the local community well-being through sustainable tourism.

In 1991 the cooperation among stakeholders started once the government proclaimed a part of the coast a marine reserve and in the next years the partners worked together in order to amplify the protected area; in 1998 the Government declared El Nido-Taytay Managed Resource Protected Area (MRPA) with a total area of more than 36,000 hectares of land and 54,000 hectares of marine waters. One year later the Management Board for the MPRA was constituted by all the stakeholders previously presented and a plan containing the different zones, uses and restrictions was presented. In parallel with the solid partnership, El Nido resorts were developed and managed in a sustainable way, following the requirements of the Management Plan of the MRPA.

Over the years two other eco-resorts have been built in the zone (Apulit Island and Pangulasian Island) and they both had to obtain the Environmental Compliance Certificate issued from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. All the resorts have been developed following the principle of eco sustainability and natural preservation, in line with the company philosophy.

## SOCIO/ECONOMIC ASPECT

In 2001, the Asian Conservation Company (ACC) was constituted by different stakeholders with the aim of connecting private sector investments and natural conservation. This new institution had three major objectives: satisfying financial return for shareholders, environmental preservation through a sustainable financing mainly in tourism and corporate carefulness by adopting rural employment and educational opportunities.

Such initiatives were successful as many jobs positions were available for locals which became also more committed and interested to protect the environment.

In the next years many other social and environmental measures and actions were adopted and subsequently ACC leveraged its equity and managed to obtain funding for the next six years for the multi-stakeholders cooperation. Some initiatives affecting positively the population and carried on thanks to such collaboration were: educational programmes, support for ecotourism initiatives, working with local boat operators and restaurant association, supporting handicraft production, and providing links between local agriculture and tourism operations.

## DISCUSSION

For this case study it was to pay attention more on the stakeholders partnership rather than the eco-resort practices which are based on eco sustainability principles anyway; especially in regard the first three cases in fact enough emphasis and explanations were given for the proper eco practices in planning and operational phases whereas this case study was really important in order to understand how to implement and run a correct and sustainable partnership among various stakeholders having the same aims: natural conservation and social wellbeing. It was rather clear how a union of many different members can guarantee better results and in a larger scale; indeed the number of initiatives is really high and at the same time really diversified as the main concerns about the environmental protection and social well-being receive the same attention from the instituted associations. In a certain way this example can be considered as an overall pattern for the implementation of a wholesome business model able to be sustainable under an economic, social and environmental point of view and at the same time it is a catalyst for the development of a bigger organisation with various stakeholders having the same purpose.

## **Banyan Tree: Embracing the Environment, Empowering People**

### BACKGROUND

According to Benckendorff & Lund-Durlacher (2013) Banyan Tree Holding Limited is a company founded in 1992 by the Thai Wah/Wah Chan Group after the purchasing of a piece of land in Bang Tao Bay, Thailand; this was just the beginning, the company expanded and nowadays it manages other resorts, hotels, SPAs all over the world. Precisely Banyan Tree Holdings Limited is the main company which owns two other brands, Banyan Tree and Angsana (launched in

2000). When in 1983 around 1000 acres were bought by the company in Bang Tao Bay, the ecosystem situation was disastrous as trees and vegetation were eradicated causing the erosion of the land because the previous use of chemical products polluted the soil and prevented the presence of animals. Even though the situation was alarming, after an overall expense of US \$200 million, the natural situation in the island was restored and Laguna Phuket was ready with its integrated seven hotels and other facilities.

Banyan Resorts philosophy is mostly relying on specific values which are reflected on the concrete actions this company is carrying on. Such criteria are:

- Ensure to its employees a fair and honest partnership in order to fulfil the company's growth while enhancing their working knowledge and life condition.
- Preserve and improve the local community well-being and help them in case of issues and needs.
- Pay attention to the natural environment, preserve the ecosystem and decrease as much as possible the impact that the business operations have on it.

These values have been followed over the years not just theoretically but with concrete actions in different fields. Many preservation initiatives have been generated especially with sensibilisation programmes for local community, guests and children in particular; some examples are beach cleaning activities, reed cleaning dives, guided nature walks which are intended to show the importance of the ecosystem and the importance of protecting it.

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECT

Two conservation laboratories work in Bintan and the Maldives in order to study, monitor the sea life and rainforest biodiversity, find new eco sustainable technologies and educate people. Continuing with environmental preservation, since 2007 Banyan Tree formed a subsidiary (GPS) to conduct environmental studies and some of the successful projects are: pontoon ferries engine, used for Banyan Tree guests in Phuket island, were switched from gasoline to electric motor, in many properties Banyan Tree installed a more efficient lighting and timers for decreasing the energy consumption in public areas; wastewater and rainwater are used for irrigation in most of the properties and waste separation is adopted for diminishing the amount sent to the landfill.

## SOCIO/ECONOMIC ASPECT

Along with the natural preservation programme in 2007 Seedlings was established with the principle objective of ensuring long term well-being and prosperity for the local communities by instructing young people for a better future.

More specifically mentoring programs, supported by associates trained by the University of Wales, are helping teenagers ranging between 12 and 18 years which might be excluded from the society, with interactions, discussion and so on. Scholarships are furnished to teenagers who could not afford an education and at the end they can obtain an internship in one of Banyan Tree hotels. A particular initiative going on in China helps women, who are involved in postpartum, neonatal and elderly care, to gain entrepreneurial knowledge and skills in order to give their contribute to the community. In 2011, after the tsunami, Banyan Tree associated and donations raised over US\$30,000 for the communities and donated the funds for a structure in Japan, helping children who lost one or both the parents in the disaster. Furthermore at the end of the same year other US\$70,000 were collected and donated to the communities in Bangkok and Thailand damaged by floods.

## DISCUSSION

This case study, unlike those previously proposed, is actually a macro reality that has expanded at the international level. Although core values are in fact the same of a single ecolodge as they aim to enhance operational efficiencies, build local capacities and conserve biodiversity, the ability and the commitment to coordinate all these environmental and social initiatives in different countries must surely be greater. The responsibility for a great coordination and management is indeed one of the main factors to promote successful initiatives and a positive aspect is that, being Banyan Tree a chain hotel, once the confidence of people and institutions is obtained, it is much easier to operate and establish new actions. In conclusion this case study showed that the implementation of a sustainable touristic business model is not a strict prerogative of single and small eco-resorts but it can also be established and developed in a wider way with bigger outcomes.

## **Seven Spirit Bay, Australia**

## BACKGROUND

According to Harris & Leiper (2001) Seven Spirit Bay is an eco-accommodation with twenty four units located 160 kilometres from Darwin and more precisely on the Cobourg Peninsula which partly constitutes the Gurig National Park. Reach the lodge is not easy as it is necessary to land first and then reach the destination by car or boat. This area and so the lodge is under control of the Cobourg Peninsula Sanctuary Board that is principally composed by Aboriginal owners and secondarily by the Northern Territory Conservation Commission.

In 1987 they were asked from various development groups to identify potential touristic projects in the area to maximize lease rentals and offer job opportunities to Aboriginals and Lowell Capital Limited proposed a small scale and eco sustainable lodge with the specific request that no further development would have been done in the area, in order to preserve it and offer to guests a valuable experience. After discussions and negotiations in april 1988 Seven Spirit Wilderness obtained the permission for the development of the resort.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECT

When the construction started many environmental criteria were established for example the use of specific corridors and the implementation of the units away from lush vegetation areas. In order to preserve the nature and offer to guests the most authentic experience, buildings arose twenty meters back from the shore and colors and materials were decided to be predominantly linear with the surrounding environment. Another important technique that have been adopted were the detachment of the toilets and showers from the habitation due to the possible seepages from the septic tanks that would have caused the contamination of the bay. A Preliminary Environmental Report was prepared by Seven Spirit Bay and it contained each of the development phases and their possible risks; some of them were: potential damage of the beach during initial landing, potential soil erosion due to concentration of wheel tracks, increasing turbidity in the bay, visual impact of development especially for the adjacent park users.

#### SOCIO/ECONOMIC ASPECT

There are approximately fifty Aboriginal people living in the park which also have the ownership of the area and are really attached to this land and their traditions. Seven Spirit Bay pays a flat rent to Aboriginal and it offers employment and training opportunities to them as guides; certainly this is beneficial for both the parties and

in this case for the guests as well as they have the possibility of learning a lot from their culture and traditions.

Benefits generated from the implementation of this structure are a lot for instance the minimal impact, the environmental protection of the surrounding area and the economic benefits for both native owners and investors.

## DISCUSSION

This case study presents one of the first and most successful eco-resorts worldwide in the past years at least. It offers an overview about a proper business implementation executed according to fundamental guidelines and criteria; in this case moreover benefits gained are under social, economic and environmental point of view.

The protection of their culture is a fundamental part, since native communities have a really strong attachment to their traditions and the pursuance of the cultural aspect is the mandatory condition for the preservation of the environment and the social enhancement.

### **Surama Village Eco-lodge, Guyana**

## BACKGROUND

As stated in Karwacki (n.d.) Surama Village Eco-lodge is situated in Guyana a South American country bordering with Venezuela and Brazil and more precisely the lodge is located at the side of North Rupununi wetlands which is one of the better conserved world's areas containing an high level of biodiversity. It is an example of a successful community-based business perfectly integrated in harmony with the nature.

Surama is populated by 300 Makushi indigenous people, able to perfectly mix and balance their traditions and culture with the modern skills and knowledges necessary for run a business and preserve the surrounding environment at the same time.

Initially the community borrowed around \$5,000 USD for the construction of the ecolodge that had a great success and helped them to flourish; the development occurred through sustainable tourism based on sustainable criteria and actions which are mostly reflected on the preservation of the ecosystem and the indigenous culture.

In a little period of time the success of this community-based business was huge and it won many recognitions. Among the most prestigious ones in 2010 Sydney Allicock, the director of the lodge, was chosen for the Anthony N Sabga Caribbean Awards for Excellence thanks to his leadership and commitment for the community and the nature. In 2011, Surama was elected by National Geographic Traveller one of the best ecolodges in South America. Again, in 2011, Surama Village Eco-lodge was chosen as the joint winner of the Caribbean Excellence in Sustainable Tourism Award.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECT

Surama Village Ecolodge can be considered a tool for the protection of the natural and cultural environment; obviously all the construction methods, practices and activities are totally ecofriendly and attentive to the conservation.

For instance the number of visitors is rather reduced in order to not overstress the ecosystem, all the activities, which are numerous, are led by expert local guides able to teach guests about the surrounding nature and culture. Surama Village Ecolodge also carries on reforestation and monitoring programmes that are really important for the correct preservation.

#### SOCIO/ECONOMIC ASPECT

Residents and particularly children are really involved with ecotourism; they in fact lead visitors on nature and cultural initiatives, welcome them and offer performances regarding the Makushi traditions.

The Junior Wildlife Club, established in 1998, is forming children from 6 to 18 years old with the main objective of increase into them awareness about the rainforest environment and it provides the skills for its management. Moreover adults can take programmes for becoming ranger, guide and researchers. All the staff members work in rotation in order to ensure to the workers the possibility of continue with their traditional life and so not to lose their inner culture. A culture group has been established to increase the motivation and also to preserve the culture of the Makushi people especially among the young people that would otherwise lose interest. This group is composed by more than 20 people who perform traditional dances, songs, poems especially for tourists that have the possibility to learn from the Makushi. Furthermore a Makushi Language Program is held in schools with the same cultural preservation aim.



Economically speaking incomes also come from the micro industry working with the ecolodge; profits have been also used for buying vehicles, installing solar power panels, refurbishing the lodge and so on. Moreover fees paid by guests and employees are used for the enhancement of the local community through initiatives such as the creation of health and educational infrastructures, scholarships for university and maintenance. Another significant initiative provides, through the local fund, micro-loans to local entrepreneurs with the same goal of improving the community well-being.

Also many partnerships, important to ensure a better preservation of the area and the people living there, have been created over the years. In 2001 Nina Hill Institute, focused on natural resources management and occupational and economic development, was established mainly for training and research. Another partnership has been settled between Surama and Eerepami Regenwaldstiftung, a German organization, for helping remote and poor areas with the development and biodiversity conservation. Surama also participates in international cultural exchanges, including two exchanges with indigenous groups from Canada.

## DISCUSSION

The decision to examine this particular case study was chosen for its peculiar background, development and operational structure; after obtaining a small loan infact this community was able to create a perfectly structured business model based on the ecolodge activities that aim at the preservation of the natural and social environment and the enhancement of the economical welfare.

The most important aspect is that the Makushi are really attached to their traditions, culture and ecosystem and they use this sustainable model to maintain and preserve what is important for them. Moreover the number and the type of initiatives, actions and partnerships aiming to the cultural, health and economic improvement of the community and the extreme attention to the natural safeguard are significant and clear signals for the carefulness these people have for their land.

## 4.2 Discussion and theory

### 4.2.1 Introduction

The cases studies have been specifically selected with different characteristics and backgrounds. There are in fact individual eco-resorts or ecolodges situated in different places in the world and with different practices; few of them for instance can be categorized as a community-based businesses, couple of them are chain

resorts and SPAs with a strong social and environmental responsibility; nevertheless they all share and support the same values just in different ways depending on the locations and the general destination situation and background.

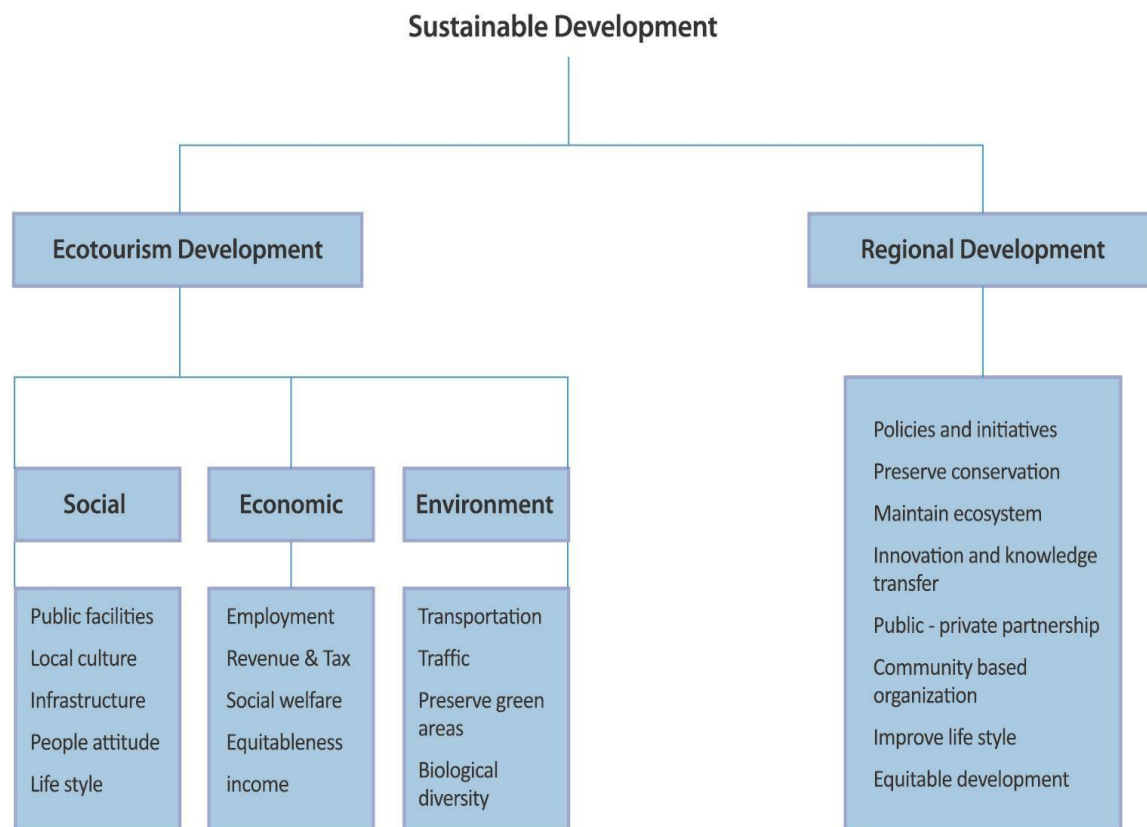


Figure 1: Sustainable development (Bhuiyan et al., 2012, cited by Kiper, 2013)

As shown in Figure 1 above and cited in Kiper (2013), the three necessary pillars required for the right implementation and development of ecotourism were frequently integral part of the eco resorts and ecolodges previously described. In some cases the environmental aspect was prevailing on the social one but the main reason is mostly attributable to the nature of the location; the Soneva Fushi case for example, positioned in a small Maldivian island, is surrounded by an extended coral reef and ecosystem in general, thus the activities are mainly focused on the environmental preservation.

Nevertheless, reporting The International Ecotourism Society (2015) definition where ecotourism is considered as a "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education" it is noticeable how these components,

although in varying degrees, are uniquely present in the eight case studies selected; particularly in regards the conservation of the territory, thanks to the sustainable eco practices adopted by the ecolodges during the phase of construction and operations but also about the enhancement of local populations well-being and the preservation of their culture. Of the three pillars which are analysed the one related to land and ecosystem conservation plays a thicker role. This can be determined by the fact that, assuming that ecotourism and consequently ecolodges are mainly based on nature, without a natural environment to protected would therefore be difficult to offer jobs to local people; after completion of the classic hospitality jobs as a receptionist, waiter and so on it would indeed be challenging to create new ones if not linked to the preservation of the nature. In fact in general all the ecolodges are situated in developing countries in which the working supply is low and the natural resources are many and thus the preservation of the territory serves as a means to control the nature and simultaneously providing employment for local people.

Another yardstick is offered by the general definition of ecoresort offered by ECO RESORTS (2010). As can be seen from the bullet points below, these are general characteristics to recognize whether an ecolodge is developed with effective criteria; Such standards are also recognizable in the presented case studies.

- Provide comfortable rooms and common areas that reflect local design and heritage.
- Offer a natural setting that has been carefully preserved retaining indigenous landscaping.
- Use local, sustainably harvested and/or recycled building materials.
- Purchase foodstuffs from local farmers, ranchers and fishermen.
- Use renewable energy and environmentally sensitive water and waste disposal systems.
- Employ and train local workers.
- Offer a variety of excursions and educational materials to natural and cultural sites.
- Support and be supported by the local community and businesses.

(ECO-RESORTS, 2010)

It is now important, for the final aim of this research, to consider each of the three pillars, link to the case studies and pick up the most common and used practices of these practical examples.

#### 4.2.2 Environmental aspect

According to the National Ecotourism Strategy (NES) of the Australian Commonwealth Department of Tourism (1994), and cited in Blamey (1997), ecotourism is defined as “nature-based tourism that involves education and interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable” where sustainability has also an intrinsic social meaning (Blamey, 1997, p. 110).

To obtain a more practical and overall understanding, the most effective eco practices and activities of each case study are reported in following.

- Chumbe Ecolodge: creation of the first Marine Protected Area in Tanzania, species conservation strategy, constant eco-technologies updating, successful public/private collaboration, constant monitoring and reports and accommodation close to zero ecological impact.
- Isla Palenque: preventive master plan containing environmental and cultural information, declaration of 50 percent of the island as a protected natural sanctuary, minimum food and raw materials use thanks to the creation of an organic orchard, implementation of an edible forest garden and fruit trees, big part of the energy furnished by the solar panels and wind power, minimum visual and environmental impact of the buildings.
- Soneva Fushi: prior impact study (containing information on the local environment, possible risks, buildings design, energy management, water supply and water-waste management), monitoring, adoption of permaculture for increasing the production of resources and decreasing the use of the land, improvement of the soil fertility through biocharcoal, minimum environmental impact of buildings, energy efficiency.
- Campi ya Kanzi: usage of stone, canvas and wood-made units, solar power energy, greywater and blackwater treatment using filtration and anaerobic reaction, use of harvested rainwater, declaration of 50 sq. km of land as conservation areas.
- El Nido and Taytay: declaration in 1998 of an extended area as Managed Resource Protected Area, conservation of terrestrial and marine ecosystem, eco sustainable development of the buildings.

- Banyan Tree: restoration of the island natural equilibrium, formation of a subsidiary (GPS) to conduct environmental studies, continuous enhancement of the eco-practices over the years (ferries engines switched from gasoline to electric ones, more efficient lightening, waste separation, rainwater and wastewater used for irrigation).
- Seven Spirit Bay: Preliminary Environmental Report prepared for each of the construction phases considering all the possible risks, use of specific corridors and units construction is far from lush vegetation, buildings are hidden and constructed following the surrounding environment.
- Surama Village Ecolodge: many awards won over the years thanks to its sustainable practices, construction methods and operational phase are ecologically friendly, local guides teach tourists about natural environment, small amount of guests in order to not overstress the ecosystem, reforestation and monitoring programmes carried on.

A first comparison of these peculiarities with Figure 1 a general combination and alignment among the theory and the cases is offered; in Figure 1 provided in Kiper (2013) infact the ecotourism environmental development lies on sustainable transportation and traffic system, the preservation of green areas and the conservation of local biodiversity.

These peculiarities are recognizable in each of the presented case studies, sometimes with different characteristics but in general, all of them, aim to the least environmental exploitation in the construction phase, the creation of a natural equilibrium of the lodge within the surrounding environment and the preservation and the enhancement of the local ecosystem through different initiatives.

Another important aspect, useful for this research, and stated in Accot et al. (1998) emphasized the differences between shallow and deep ecotourism which are able to help to define the type of accommodations provided in the case studies.

Shallow ecotourism relies on a normal relationship among nature and humans where the first one is seen as only a resource which can easily be used and exploited from the seconds in order to maximize their economical benefits. In this case the decision are taken using an anthropocentric method which is strictly related to the centric human conditions in respect the surrounding environment. As stated here, at least theoretically, none of the businesses chosen and analysed are following this criteria as the adopted practices aim to a long-run sustainable development and preservation. Perhaps the two international chains (Soneva Fushi and Banyan Tree), due to a wider and more intense expansion, have a less eco

sustainable approach under particular aspects even though overall they are not following an “anthropocentric method” more devotes to the human condition rather than the environment.

On the other hand deep ecotourism is in fact predominantly focused on deep ecology and ecocentrism ideals therefore, in other words, deep ecotourism main concepts are mostly based on the important value of nature, small-scale community identity and an active participation, a refusal to accept large-scale technologies and also a refusal to see the business as a tool for personal enrichment. The development of bioethics and ecocentrism concepts are strictly connected to ecotourism (Accot et al., 1998).

By using this definition, among the eight selected case studies, Surama Village Ecolodge, Campi ya Kanzi, Isla Palenque, Chumbe Ecolodge and Seven Spirit bay can be considered as big followers of deep ecotourism principles. Overall they are small businesses, totally focused on natural preservation thanks to the use of renewable resources and conservation practices. As stated in Sharpley (2009) every destination has a different background, different peculiarities and possibly different problems to overcome, it is thus difficult to set a certain *modus operandi* parameters; for this reason it would be important to formulate a prior environmental impact study and to define (possibly with the government or other associations) the environmental frameworks and regulations necessary for a proper implementation and monitoring; without such actions an overexploitation of the natural environment and the local community consequently, is highly possible.

#### 4.2.3 Socio/economic aspect

Taking again in consideration Kiper's (2013), (see Figure 1), a proper ecotourism development needs to fulfil certain criteria under the social and economic point of view as well; the construction of public facilities, the preservation and diffusion of local culture, the enhancement of the lifestyle the employment of local people and in general a balanced welfare are some of the points. Nevertheless such prerogatives, along with the environmental commitment, are recognizable in the cases presented and summarized below with the practical actions realized. As announced previously, each ecolodge has different characteristics and therefore it is understandable that certain prerequisites may be more fully developed in a ecolodge than that in another (for example, the first are almost exclusively focused on the preservation of nature); However each of them propose approaches aimed

at welfare of the local communities with different actions and initiatives findable in Kiper's chart.

- Chumbe Ecolodge: almost two-thirds of the total investment used for research and park management, environmental education programs for local schools and other groups, part of the staff employed in education programs.
- Isla Palenque: hiring of native people, partnerships with local businesses, sustainable development as goal, guides ensure education to locals and tourists, relationship with the community in order to ensure health, safety and sustainable growth.
- Soneva Fushi: offering of cultural activities, employees and stakeholders are part of the local community providing their knowledge, skills and products.
- Campi ya Kanzi: 90 percent of the 65 Kenyan employees are Maasai (guides and trackers included), in 2000 the establishment of Maasai Wilderness Conservation Trust for a better preservation of the ecosystem and the community thanks to the cooperation with other organisations, Trust counts 200 local people working in different areas such as conservation, education and health programs, fully land ownership and operational independence of the local community.
- El Nido and Taytay: strong collaboration with NGOs and local community, partnerships are the point of strength of its development, in 2001 Asian Conservation Company was established with the primary goal of preserving the natural environment and enhancing the population wellbeing through private cooperation, a big number of jobs for locals were created, educational initiatives were adopted, cooperation with boat operators and restaurants association, support of handicraft production, linkage between tourism and agriculture.
- Banyan Tree: establishment of Seedling for a long-term prosperity of the local communities, integration programs for kids from 12 to 18 years old, scholarships and internships are offered, in China women involved in postpartum, neonatal and elderly care are trained to gain entrepreneurial knowledge, donations for needy people involved in tsunami and floods disasters.
- Seven Spirit Bay: land ownership for the Aboriginal, employment and learning opportunities offered, economic benefits for Aboriginal, fair cooperation among community and investors.

- Surama Village Ecolodge: high community commitment, The Junior Wildlife Club forms and teaches to children between 6 and 18 years old about environmental issues and solutions, adults take programmes for ranger, guide and research, a cultural group with 20 people has been established in order to preserve traditions, thanks to the ecolodge improvements also the surrounding area has economic benefits, health and educational infrastructures have been built, scholarships for university are offered, through the local fund micro-loans are available for local entrepreneurs that want to run beneficial businesses for the community.

Another important concept which can be connected to the social and economic aspect is the one referring to Corporate Social Responsibility. According to Carroll (1999) every business is working within a surrounding environment and over the years the soul of firms changed from a profit maximization philosophy to the idea that is important to help the society and give it back welfare through different initiatives. More specifically one of the definitions proposed by Elles & Walton, as cited in Carroll (1999), says “In its broadest sense, corporate social responsibility represents a concern with the needs and goals of society which goes beyond the merely economic. Insofar as the business system as it exists today can only survive in an effectively functioning free society, the corporate social responsibility movement represents a broad concern with business’s role in supporting and improving that social order.” (Carroll, 1999, p. 278).

Such mindset is extremely relevant with the context of this research as an ecolodge, in order to be authentic, is asked to act in such wise way and it should base its philosophy also on CSR with concrete actions targeted to the enhancement of the surrounding community and the assistance of the company’s stakeholders. In the case studies proposed such social commitment is evident, especially in some of them; Campi ya Kanzi and Surama Village

Ecolodge in particular, base all their efforts on social wellbeing that is pursued through environmental preservation; nevertheless also the other cases offer practical example of wholesome corporate social responsibilities practices.

Another interesting paragon can be found in Banyan Tree which is highly focused on the concept of CSR; as stated in Patzel and Shepherd (2010) and cited in Benckendorff & Lund-Durlacher (2013) the role of the entrepreneur is fundamental and three mandatory factors for a genuine implementation are: the motivation, the perception and knowledge of the natural and community threats in the surrounding environment and altruism. Once all these criteria are understood and respected,



then it will be possible to recognize the chance for a sustainable development and thanks to altruism he or she (the entrepreneur) will be able to actually improve the community wellbeing. This statement is also amenable to the speech done by the co-founder of Banyan Tree, Ms Claire Chiang, which shows the concern for a sustainable and ethical development of her business; and looking at the company's initiatives that have been carried on over the years it is inferable the carefulness and interest given for the communities enhancement. An important key factor that has to be taken under consideration for a proper implementation of an ecolodge, as stated in The International Finance Corporation (2004), expects the constant and trustable relationship that has to be formed between public and private sector. Once again this theoretical aspect is also confirmed in the case studies as, even in different circumstances, the cooperation among public and private sector through regulations and agreements with the government, public organizations, NGOs and various stakeholders, it is a constant element. The creation of a healthy and numerous network of connections and partnerships offers a lot of advantages since in case of need there are people willing to help and moreover it guarantees consistent advantages over competitors and a better image in the public opinion.

Furthermore a proper tourism business implementation is capable to offer different opportunities in areas where there is a lack in government's operations; based on Buckley's observations and cited in Zambrano "(1) in many developing nations, ecotourism compensates for shortfalls in governmental regulation by providing private funds for the protection of natural areas and that (2) by providing alternative economic opportunities to local people, natural resource demands and environmental degradation may be reduced in the first place" (Zambrano et Al., 2010, p. 79).

Taking in consideration this statement the relation linkage with the case studies is immediate; Chumbe Ecolodge for instance created by itself the first Marine Protected Area in Tanzania, Isla Palenque declared more of the 50 percent of the island as a protected sanctuary, el Nido and Taytay certified a vast area as Managed Resource Protected Area and all these actions were accompanied by the creation of several job positions, a better environmental conservation and a higher social welfare. These three ecolodges are just an example for justifying the text cited in Zambrano (2010) but the other case studies as well present these kind of initiatives which demonstrate the actual applicability of healthy ecotourism practices and the high potential of ecolodges.

ECO-RESORTS (2010) offers some suggestions about the main characteristics and modus operandi of a real ecolodge which is following wholesome principles; under a socio/economic point of view these peculiarities are:

- Offer many opportunities for interaction with local owners, managers, staff and guides.
- Employ and train local workers.
- Offer a variety of excursions and educational materials to natural and cultural sites.
- Support and be supported by the local community and businesses.

(ECO-RESORTS, 2010).

Once again it can be seen the alignment of these theoretical rules with the case studies in which are findable opportunities for tourists to get involved with the local culture through many activities, a consistency in hiring and training local people, providing experiences that enrich the tourist under a cultural and environmental level and a constant support to the community.

#### 4.2.4 Conclusive discussion

This initial part of the research has produced satisfactory results since the data obtained from the case studies can be defined positively in line with the concepts of ecotourism and consequently lodges; the examples offered were chosen specifically with different technical and operational characteristics to give an holistic view about the economic, social and environmental impact of these businesses. Certainly it was found that some aspects are more developed in certain ecolodges or eco-resorts than in others. For example the environmental efficiency of a Banyan Tree resort is obviously smaller than the one of Surama Village Ecolodge as the first one is part of a chain of resorts and luxury SPAs, thus it must maintain certain standards while the second one is a small niche ecolodge managed by local people. Nevertheless it is also true that Banyan Tree, thanks to its greater reputation and development, is able to deal with certain problems and take certain decisions for the sake of the environment and the local population in an easier way. Each of the case studies is able to suggest, through different approaches, the best eco practices and sustainable initiatives to adopt; the first three cases (Chumbe Ecolodge, Isla Palenque and Soneva Fushi) for instance offer important information about successful eco sustainable actions during construction and operational

phases and, especially under the environmental point of view, they propose newsworthy concepts. Some general guidelines they offer are the matter of a preventive master plan containing environmental and cultural information, advises on suitable methods for built accommodation close to zero ecological impact, the importance of using renewable power sources, the significance of monitoring and so on. Campi ya Kanzi, Surama Village Ecolodge and Seven Spirit are significant since they show that through the right empowerment and training of local communities is possible to create a model in which the population is able to grow under a socio/economic point of view while respecting and conserving its culture and natural environment. Banyan Tree as stated before is probably the most different and singular example as it is a macro reality but despite its international and luxurial structure it is able to come up with natural conservation (the restoration of Bang Tao Bay environment is rather meaningful for instance) and social welfare. Finally El Nido and Taytay offered another perspective, still focused on eco sustainability through tourism, but more based on the importance of a collaboration between public and private sector and stakeholders as well.

In conclusion all the case studies bring concrete outcomes in line with the sustainability principles and moreover they suggest positive and sustainable long-run solutions that will be taken under consideration for the final business plan that provides a summarization of all these eco-practices.

## 5 Interviews

### 5.1 Introduction

Parts of the interviews are now proposed and linked with the theory in order to gain specific and direct understanding of how ecolodges operate. According to Marsiglio (2013) in fact such open-ended qualitative interviews go deeply into the context with specific questions which intend to understand the level of sustainability of each eco-accommodation. Below are listed the ecolodges and the organisations that have been contacted by email, the questions that have been asked and the discussion. The scripts of the interviews are reported in the appendix.

Pestana Troia (Portugal), Luxury Lodges of Australia (Australia), Monte Velho Eco Retreat (Portugal), Spicers Peak Lodge (Australia), One&Only One Ocean Club (Bahamas), Taj Safaris (India), Sukau Rainforest Lodge (Malaysia), Pico Bonito Eco Luxury Lodge (Honduras), Chaa Creek (Belize), Lapa Rios Ecolodge (Costa Rica), Rainforest Eco Lodge (Sri Lanka), Canopy Tower Ecolodge (Costa Rica), One & Only Reethi Rah Retreats (Maldives), Casa Vale da Lama (Portugal), Daintree Ecolodge & Spa (Australia), Kittitian Hill (Caribbeans), The Boat Landing (Laos), Chalalan Ecolodge (Bolivia), The International Ecotourism Society (Organization), Urnatur Ecolodge (Sweden), Bulungula Lodge (South Africa), Chole Mjini (Tanzania), Nuli Sapi (Papua New Guinea), Inkaterra (Perù).

- Which are general facts and figures of the ecolodge (or ecolodge)? (size, position, number of units/guests, opening year)?
- Which eco practices have been adopted in both construction and management phases?
- In which ways do you consider the ecolodge as sustainable?
- How the local population is involved in the ecolodge activities? What they do? Which benefits they have?
- Are there initiatives sponsored by the ecolodge (fundraising, infrastructures projects, charity) for enhancing the population wellbeing?
- How partnerships with other structures, NGO's, public sector and organizations are necessary for the implementation of a wholesome business model? Why?

- Does your business bring more economical, social and environmental benefits compared to a normal hotel or resort? How?
- Have you ever had political or institutional pressures that tried to contrast the implementation of your business?
- How ecotourism certifications are helpful? In which ways are they important for the business, guests and other stakeholders?

## 5.2 Discussion and theory

### 5.2.1 Introduction

The interviews helped in getting a better understanding about the internal and external environment of ecolodges. The information were in fact many, and especially three ecolodges (Inkaterra, Kittitian Hill and Nuli Sapi) made a significant contribution to the purposes of this research.

Respondents from these three ecolodges have in fact answered with great interest and professionalism and they have clarified many aspects of how the businesses operate within the natural and social environment.

A definition given by Blamey, as cited in Weaver and Lawton (2007), interprets ecotourism as a practice that need to fulfil three important criteria in order to be trustable. Such guidelines are:

- destination attractions should be mostly nature-based.
- visitor interactions with those attractions should be focused on learning or education about the local community culture and natural environment.
- experience and product management should follow principles and practices associated with ecological, socio-cultural and economic sustainability (Weaver and Lawton, 2007, p. 4).

In other words a real ecolodge should follow such directives and from the obtained interviews it can be argued that all the five businesses are following the “nature-based” pillar, four out of five (Monte Velho interview lacks of this information) provide experiences where tourists are actively involved within the local community and the environment and again all the five ecolodges follow natural and socio/economic sustainability principles that are analysed in detail in the following chapters.

Another important explanation is provided by The International Ecotourism Society (2015) where ecotourism is defined as "responsible travel to natural areas that

conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education". This similar definition is also in line with the actual nature of the interviewed ecolodges. Kittitian Hill, Canopy Tower, Nuli Sapi and Inkaterra developed conservation practices, green strategies, educational activities for both locals and tourists, direct relation with local population and stakeholders, training activities and job positions for the local community.

In addition, similarly to the case studies, these four interviews outcomes intersect with the concept of deep ecotourism which has been already introduced previously and refers to all those concepts linked with the importance of nature, the small-scale community identity and its direct participation to the businesses activities and especially the refuse to consider the business as a tool of personal enrichment but rather as a means for a sustainable enhancement of the area (Accot et al., 1998).

### 5.2.2 Social responsibility

According to Goodwin (2011) the importance of identifying the causes of a certain problem plays a major role in order to intervene effectively, because it is impossible to successfully overcome an issue without actually knowing it. Such statement can be linked with the interview made with Kittitian Hill farm Manager who, explaining the island's problem to diversify its economy from sugar which was the predominant economy, said "... when we lost preferential achievement for sugar in the European market, it signalled the time for the diversification of economy and society and this was one of the projects that was decided under the National Physical Development Plan for the island in term of charting a new future for the next 15 to 20 years. One of the challenges when you have a monoculture system is that everything is tight into it, your social life and the economy. It made us highly sugar export oriented and food import oriented and it created a high vulnerability on an island jurisdiction such as this one. For that reason we came with a new development of the island: how can we move away from sugar and being a more diversified and less vulnerable country?"

Another prominent step focuses on the importance of forming good relationships and mutual trust with local stakeholders which have to understand the importance of sustainability and this theoretical context can be connected again with Kittitian Hill as the respondent said "Kittitian Hill has 400 acres it is in a small rural community in the mountains called Saint Pauls. Kittitian Hill so it is not just a resort, rather it is a 400 acres farm with a resort on it." And then "Our philosophy is very simple and is relies on the long term sustainable development of the Caribbean

which is the responsibility of its people.” From these statements is inferable the strong interaction that has been made between the developers of Kittitian Hill and the local population that is fully involved in the resort and farm activities.

The maintenance of local heritage and authenticity are also notable points; such importance goes along with the need of cultural preservation and these aspects can be truly found in the interviewed ecolodges; in particular Inkaterra manager’s answer was significant as they stated that “4000 people from local communities have been trained by Inkaterra since its establishment. Career opportunities on ecotourism, hospitality and field guidance help mitigating migration and to safeguard local cultures.”

Charity and pro-community initiatives are also an integral part for a correct and sustainable community development; the contacted ecolodges are rather active under this aspect as they carry on different programmes. Nuli Sapi owner for instance said “we also donate money and resources to local schools and churches”; the same commitment has been shown by Kittitian Hill manager who answered “Yearly Christmas party for children in the community, staff Volunteers on critical development committees offering expertise at no cost, repair work on the local primary schools in the communities downstream of the development and outfitted them with computer labs and annual sponsorship to the local community basketball club.” Whereas the owner of Canopy Tower, in regard pro-community actions answered “Many, help in fixing roads, repairing local aqueducts, schools, sport teams.” Inkaterra as well through various initiatives that are listed in its website demonstrates its carefulness for the local community. In Inkaterra (2016) the social commitment is shown with the educational workshops for schools where kids are motivated to gain a high level of environmental awareness, a wide number of training courses and scholarships; also in the interview such interest for the local population is underlined as in one statement they wrote “Three hotel managers are born and raised in local communities”.

A related topic, explained in McElhaney (2009), offers meaningful information about the importance of the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility for the business and the most suitable practices that have to be carried on in order to obtain a successful development; such actions, if well implemented, are able to provide positive effects for both the community and the company and more specifically a firm can gain a reduction of operational costs, an improvement of the company image in the public opinion, a closer and stronger relationship with stakeholders, higher competitiveness over competitors. For all these reasons the importance of

responsible practices within the local community is even greater as it is able to offer benefits to both the sides.

### 5.2.3 Economic responsibility

As stated in Goodwin (2011) one of the biggest challenges of tourism is to make the destination a better place to live for the local population and a better place to go for tourists. This statement finds an immediate correlation with the answers of the respondents as generally speaking the ecolodges provide an enhancement of the economic situation of the community. More specifically Monte Velho manager said “we developed a protocol where the local people living around are involved. For instance, they take over the permaculture garden and the catering service. This involves 10 people from the area”; Nuli Sapi owner stated that “the local people are employed in the areas of maintenance, housekeeping, kitchen, bar, tour guides, dinghy operators and security. We purchase fresh products and seafood from local people.” And moreover “economically speaking we pay higher wages than hotels/resorts in the towns. The employees are able to use their earnings within the local community without the cost associated with living in a town.” Also Kittitian Hill Farm manager provided an exhaustive answer saying that “...in 2014 the people directly employed in the business were 529 working in administration, management, engineering, officer and in this figure small contractors are not included” and “Local farmers benefit from our food journey and our food procurement policies. 90 percent of all food ingredients served at our restaurants come from our onsite farm, local farmers and fishers”. Such information confirm the positive effects that an ecolodge is able to apport into a community whether ecotourism criteria are respected and valorised. It is also prominent the fact that all these businesses bring welfare and protection in areas where otherwise there would have not been any other possible way for a sustainable development, thus they demonstrate an overall positive effect on the social and economic environment. Studies on field conducted in Uganda, South Africa and Caribbean and reported in Harrison & Schipani (2007) show how enterprises can get benefits out of locals collaboration in economical terms and vice-versa as such businesses are able to provide work by directly hiring natives, ask them for raw materials, primary goods and so on. Moreover community-based tourism have been classified as a successful economic model principally for the local population that is able to enhance its social wellbeing situation and preserve the ecosystem through tourism. Such findings are in line with the data gained in the interviews since overall it is notable a social and economic



improvement of the local community thanks to the implementation of these small-scale enterprises.

#### 5.2.4 Environmental responsibility

According to Goodwin (2011) due to the human activity and overexploitation of the nature over the last decades there are increasing environmental issues worldwide. For this reason the development of effective business strategies and the diffusion of healthy ecotourism are somehow mandatory for the touristic sector. "Tourism can, it is argued, provide potential livelihood opportunities for indigenous communities in and around protected areas, as well as an economic reason to create and manage parks" (Goodwin, 2011, p.228).

Such statement can be largely found in at least four ecolodges as they rely their the community development on such criteria. The lodges have in fact been built following eco sustainable guidelines in regard the construction phase and during the operational one when other eco-practices have been constantly added.

For instance based on the interview Kittitian Hill has a golf court designed in order to have the least impact possible on the environment and "it got the certification from the Golf Environment Organization; it is 100% organic that means we don't use any chemical fertilizer and pesticide and we have to take off weed by hand so it is labour intense but more sustainable". Moreover any tree was removed and all the material collected during the excavation was reused. In another significant part of the interview the respondent said "Over the years we have improved a lot the landscape by planting more than 17.000 trees with over hundred varieties of mango and in general our aim is to use valuable plants such as fruit or medical trees and plants that can be used in the community and the resort. We have the aim to be 100% renewable energy dependent by 2020 thanks to wind, solar and biodiesel power. We are not destroying nature but actually we are enhancing it".

Inkaterra as well demonstrated its commitment in different ways such as natural inventories, virgin forest preservation and eco sustainable practices that have been adopted in the lodges during construction and operational phases. In its website in fact it is stated that "Inkaterra mitigates the effects of deforestation in the Amazon rainforest whilst contributed with carbon sequestration through the preservation of Peru's first ecological concession, with more than 10,000 hectares of virgin rainforest." (Inkaterra, 2016). Other initiatives can be found in the interview where the managers stated "Flora and fauna inventories are performed to define natural areas where hotels are established. This baseline allows Inkaterra to compare its

own long-term impact over nature.” And “Hotels are built with native materials, designed inspired by local cultures, and green operations practiced to use water and other resources in an efficient way”. Canopy Tower as well shows its green commitment in its webpage where all the initiatives are categorized into different sub areas which are energy, water and waste management and construction; every field includes plenty of different actions (Canopy Family, 2016). “We used sustainable bush material such as sago, native trees and vines to construct the buildings. We use solar power. The lodge was built amongst the existing vegetation. No trees were removed during construction”.

These answers are also reflected in Olson (2009) which states "Businesses are identifying initiatives that are simultaneously improving both the environment and their own businesses performances." (Olson, 2009, p.6). Such sentence has a prominent meaning as performing green strategies is not an advantage only for the environment but it brings benefits also to the company itself that can have a significant cost reduction especially in the long-run. Moreover as previously mentioned the natural environment has a prominent importance as it is the catalyst for the enhancement of the local community wellbeing thus it covers a predominant importance in the overall process. According to the Centre for Ecotourism and Sustainable Development (2008) eco labels and certifications are also effective tools which can help to understand the real social and environmental commitment of a business and in this case the most substantial answers were given by Kittitian Hill manager who stated “Kittitian Hill has achieved various accolades including the Geo-Golf Development Status award. However, the development is not limited by the criteria and standards of these awarding agencies. KH development is about redefining the boundaries and rules of development in the Caribbean. The awards are welcomed but they aren’t the focus. Our purpose is to bring together art and culture, society and the economy to give our locals and guest a memorable and unique experience while ensuring the integrity of our environment benefits therefrom are experienced equitably by the local people.” and Inkaterra managers who, regarding the question related to the importance of eco labels and certifications answered “The biggest benefit is to create added value for rural communities while safeguarding the environment, which has brought up a strong positive image and brand recognition. It has led Inkaterra to be member of alliances such as Relais & Châteaux, Virtuoso and National Geographic Unique Lodges of the World. Inkaterra caters to more than 200,000 travellers annually”.

In both the answers the main concern for the respondents was about underlining the importance of the enhancement of the local community and the preservation of

the ecosystem rather than the achievement of the certifications and under a certain point of view it strengthens the idea of carefulness that these businesses really have for the whole environment within they operate.

### 5.2.5 Conclusive discussion

The interviews offer a substantial overview of how these businesses work in practice and the results are able to provide interesting data.

Monte Velho manager is the only respondent who did not offer any particular information and knowledge even though the small description provided seems to follow certain type of criteria related to ecotourism.

Canopy Tower respondent and owner did not offer a complete interview due to his time constraint; nevertheless he offered plenty of information in his business website that are also significantly meaning a certain commitment for the preservation of the environment and the enhancement of the local community wellbeing.

Nuli Sapi owner answers can be categorized as effective but not totally exhaustive in regard certain aspects but the overall contribution has been prominent and inspiring since the business seems to operate effectively in regard long-term sustainability.

Inkaterra and Kittitian Hill particularly helped for the final purpose of this research as the answers can be directly attributable to ecotourism and lodges principles and criteria which have been theoretically examined; every aspect that is needed for a wholesome ecotourism implementation can in fact be found in these two ecolodges. Despite the different assistance provided from the respondents, the selected businesses (except for Monte Velho) can all be considered as suitable businesses model under the social, economic and environmental points of view and Figure 3 by Drumm & Moore and cited in Kiper (2013) offers a concrete vision which can be linked with the ecolodges.

All these lodges planned and are still planning initiatives and actions for supporting the business, the community and the environment; they all are protecting and enhancing the natural environment in which they are established; financing and aid are constantly provided to the community through different actions such as fundraising, charity, construction of facilities and so on; they all have a strong and wide network of partnerships and cooperation with local producers, organizations, and other stakeholders that are actively participating to the business operations; education and training is provided to both locals and guests. Education is an

important tool for improve people's awareness about social and environmental problems and solutions thus it is effectively proposed, in different ways, to tourists and community whereas training is proposed to local people that can gain knowledge and get a job in ecotourism field more easily.

All these aspects combined together have the enormous potential to create sustainable development in a given area, and at least from the interviews and the information obtained, four of the five ecolodges achieved to implement a business that delivers benefits to the society and the environment.



Figure 3: Ecotourism development, (Drumm & Moore, 2002, cited in Kiper, 2013).

In conclusion the interviews, after the case studies, have demonstrated the positive impact that an ecolodge can have if well implemented and developed in the surrounding area; after the subsequent personal assessment of sustainability of case studies and interviews (chapter 6), the gained information will be taken into

account for the final business plan (chapter 7) which summarize the best ways to proceed for implementing a prosperous and sustainable ecolodge.

## 6 Personal assessment of sustainability efficacy of case studies and interviews

The table below is based on a self-efficacy evaluation which takes into consideration and rates the most important aspects of the case studies and the interviews previously proposed. According to Bandura (2006) in fact the chosen items should be based on what is the actual research method and goals; moreover as stated in his article “Efficacy items should accurately reflect the construct. Self-efficacy is concerned with perceived capability.” (Bandura, 2006, p.309). Such items have been chosen considering the relationship of the twelve accommodations within the surrounding area; the main fields are the environmental and socio/economic ones (Gibson, 2001) and for each of them are proposed different factors of analysis that are able to show which lodges are operating in the most sustainable way. An extra help is offered by Green Globe that is a company which sets worldwide standards, within the tourism industry, based on sustainable development; the number of criteria which are taken under consideration by Green Globe is enormous and there are different levels of certification depending on the grade of commitment (Green Globe, 2015). Despite the extended size of criteria and indicators, the table sums up the most important standards also based on the case studies and interview information previously obtained. The scores are personally given by the author, they go from 1 to 5 and they can be differentiated as 1 (really low commitment), 2 (low commitment), 3 (medium commitment), 4 (high commitment) and 5 (really high commitment).

The selected key factors are:

- Number of rooms: the smaller is the number of rooms the higher is the assigned score as with a lower number of units occurs a higher sustainability.
- Facilities efficiency: the more facilities and services are provided (swimming pool, SPA etc.) the lower is the sustainability.
- Construction method: Used materials, method of build, prior construction impact plan, exploitation of the surrounding area are taken under consideration.
- Renewable resources and water and waste management: the use of renewable energies is an important tool for understanding the lodge sustainability as well as treatment of water and waste.

- Environmental protection: all those actions aiming at the environmental preservation (creation of protected areas, monitoring, cooperation with other conservation organizations)
- Cultural activities and training: takes in account training and job positions provided to the locals and cultural activities offered to guests.
- Local community involvement: the degree of involvement of the community with the ecolodge like raw material suppliers, local services, cooperation with other local associations, etc.
- Pro-community actions: All those actions aiming at improve the community wellbeing such as fundraising, charity, construction of facilities, scholarships etc.

	Environmental aspect					Socio/economic aspect			
	N. of rooms	Facilities efficiency	Construction method	Renewable resources and water/waste manag.	E. P.	Cultural activities and training	Local community involvement	Pro-community actions	Total
CASE STUDIES									
Chumbe Ecolodge	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	37
Isla Palenque	5	5	5	4	5	4	3	3	34
Soneva Fushi	3	3	4	3	4	3	3	2	25
Campiya kanzi	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	40
El Nido/Taytay	4	3	4	4	5	5	5	5	35
Banyan Tree	2	2	3	4	4	4	4	4	27

Seven Spirit	5	5	5	4	4	5	5	5	38
Surama Village	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	40
INTERVIEWS									
Kittitian Hill	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	39
Canopy Tower	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	5	38
Nuli Sapi	5	5	5	4	4	4	5	5	37
Inkaterra	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	39

*Table 1: Assessment of case studies and interviews.*

The table indicates some outstanding results, especially for Campi ya Kanzi and Surama Village Ecolodge as they reflect all those beneficial practices needed for the natural preservation and the local community wellbeing. Moreover they are a rather small realities (comparing to Banyan Tree for instance) and the application of certain sustainability principles is easier; another favourable circumstance is the fact that the operational phases are directly carried on by the local population that is not only working for the lodge but it is managing the business. This is probably one of the most significant aspects as the local community in these two lodges is directly committed in the preservation of its natural resources and the enhancement of its local population welfare, thus the willingness of a proper development is higher. However the self-evaluation showed other newsworthy results in regard other ecolodges, Kittitian Hill and Inkaterra for instance which obtained a great overall score thanks to their long-run sustainable development; their social and environmental carefulness is really high and as already mentioned they are heavily following sustainable principles. Moreover according again to Ties (2015) there are some indicators which can be used and have a prominent impact:

- Minimize physical, social, and psychological impacts.
- Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect.
- Provide direct financial benefits for conservation.
- Generate financial benefits for both local people and private industry.



- Deliver memorable interpretative experiences to visitors that help raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climates.
  - Design, construct and operate low-impact facilities.
  - Recognize the rights and spiritual beliefs of the Indigenous people in your community and work in partnership with them to create empowerment.
- (TIES, 2015).

As notable all these factors are also reflected into the self-evaluation table which is exhaustive and it offers an overall comprehension on the most sustainable lodges. Furthermore these criteria set by TIES in regard the authenticity of an ecolodge are directly connected to the most successful ecolodges rated in the table above, thus it confirms the positive evaluation results.

Important for the final result is to figure out whether the research questions placed at the beginning of this research are fulfilled.

- Is it possible to create a successful business accommodation (under an economic point of view) by respecting and helping at the same time environment and local population?

Yes it is possible. Results show the possibility to establish an ecolodge able to guarantee environmental protection, socio/economic enhancement of the local community and a fair financial return at the same time. Most of the cases indicate that thanks to the accommodation a whole economic system has been developed despite before nothing was established. Such system guarantees in the long-run more job positions, higher wages, higher community economic power, higher cultural protection, education and training and higher environmental conservation. Despite the lodges have different sizes, structures and goals, they all seem to follow sustainable principles and even if it is evident that some of them are heavily focused on all the ecotourism pillars whereas others are more centered on environmental protection rather than social enhancement, they all demonstrate the powerfulness of a wholesome project focused on long-term sustainability.

- Why do ecolodges have to be considered as a new and suitable type of accommodation for travellers?

Considering that the distribution of ecolodges is mostly among developing countries, an immoderate use of resources (usually caused by large hotels

and chains) would definitely be drastic for both the environment and the local population. Thus from the findings obtained, these accommodations have to be considered as new and suitable type of accommodation because, whether the implementation is correctly generated, it can offer huge long-run benefits to the surrounding ecosystem and community. Moreover it is also able to spread among local people working knowledge (which is an important aspect especially in developing countries) and guests can experience something new compared to the ordinary accommodations as they are totally involved with the surrounding environment. As resulted from the case studies and interviews, ecolodges can act as catalysts in areas rich of culture and nature but lacking of an overall organization. According to Honey M. (2008) ecotourism focuses on both the protection of ecosystems and locals wellbeing as well and it is also considered the most fastly growing sector of tourism; and ecolodges are the extension of ecotourism thus they have the capabilities to give their contribution for a sustainable development.

- How can a lodge be considered as “eco” and sustainable? Which peculiarities are necessary for a proper implementation?

This questions finds its answer in the business plan (chapter number 8) strictly based on eco sustainability principles.

Such concerns and eco practices expressed in the case studies and in the interviews are now used for the business plan which offers the best actions that should be utilized.

## 7 Business plan

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter is a personal normative contribution to the literature which is offered as final step forward for the final understanding about how an appropriate ecolodge would be established. The furnished information and the previous research conducted through this work, in fact, can be now utilized in this final part that deals with the theoretical development of an ecolodge which follows the best sustainable practices previously analysed. Nevertheless this chapter is not meant to offer a complete and exhaustive business plan but rather the goal is to suggest the most coherent and recommended way to act in developing a suitable eco-accommodation within a given area. The main phases are listed and for each of them the most feasible actions are proposed with a prior short market analysis which can be helpful for the eventual result.

### 7.2 Market Analysis

- Market segmentation: according to The International Finance Corporation (2004) the ecotourism market is expected to increase constantly in the next decades with a growth rate of 10 percent annually. Such trend can be also contextualized with the mounting presence of baby boomers which are old travellers with a higher longevity, a good financial situation and enough knowledge and information to organize responsible holidays. Most of the eco tourists come from the United States of America, Europe, Japan, New Zealand and Australia and normally they chose their destination, and then the accommodation, based on the proposed attractions and activities. Moreover every segment prefers different destinations and different ways to organize the vacation: North Americans for instance are more attracted by Central America destinations and they tend to travel on tour whereas people from United Kingdom prefer Asian countries, Germans normally go to Latin America and European in general are more likely to travel independently.
- Factors of attraction: despite the different destinations that propose various activities which can range from marine activities predominantly promoted in the Pacific or jungle/forest ones heavily offered in South America, the most appealing attraction for eco tourists is always wildlife. Regardless the

destination, hiring skilled guides able to offer dynamic, interesting and cultural tours have been seen as a successful tool which can increase the customer's loyalty and thus offer a concrete advantage over competitors. An interesting information also states that bird-watching tourists count for about 10 to 15 percent of the total ecotourism market share as they spend all their time on bird-watching based activities (The International Finance Corporation, 2004).

- Price: experts argue that generally ecotourists are concerned on accommodation that are really following ecotourism principles since the average rates are higher comparing to normal hotels, thus they expect valuable experiences; nevertheless in many natural destination travellers chose mid-price conventional accommodations due to a lack of mid-range ecolodges. A study of 6,515 lodges in 60 developing countries showed that 73 percent of them were low-budget (less than \$50 per night), 18 percent were mid budget (\$50–\$100 per night) and 7 percent were high-budget (over \$100 per night); consequently it has actually been shown there is a lack of mid-budget accommodations (The International Finance Corporation, 2004).
- Ecolodges position: a previous study, as stated in The International Finance Corporation (2004), offers an overview about where are positioned 5,459 nature-based lodges in 60 countries and 106 ecolodges which accomplished the surveys; the countries were selected depending on the number of nature-based lodges, their ecotourism industry development and their placement in particular areas with high natural relevance. The countries with the highest number of lodges were Indonesia (758), Costa Rica (590), Thailand (468), Peru (356), Ecuador (345), Guatemala (322), Mexico (304), Sri Lanka (277) and Tanzania (259). Among these lodges, as stated in Conservation International and cited in The International Finance Corporation (2004), 84 percent are situated in biodiversity hot spot area.

### 7.3 Introduction to the ecolodge

EcoDream Lodge business plan wants to offer general information about its characteristics vision, mission, business aims and the ways to pursue such goals. Once again, the proposed information and actions are based on previous theoretical research and the personal gained knowledge. One of the most incisive goal is to get an eco-certification approving the real sustainability of the lodge and

its operations; according to Bien (2008) in fact by obtaining a certification the ecolodge credibility, among stakeholders and guests, would increase and its operational costs would decrease.

### 7.3.1 Location

The location choice was made taking into account several factors; first of all the market analysis previously carried out and the information obtained revealed that most of the ecolodges are located in Central America, Latin America and Southeast Asia (The International Finance Corporation, 2004). This is mainly due to the fact that under a natural point of view these areas have an extended biodiversity that is more rich, wide and at the same time delicate compared to other zones. Furthermore these developing countries are more affected to the need of preserving the nature while helping the local population.

Calakmul Biosphere Reserve, located at the base of the Yucatan Peninsula (Mexico) has been ideally chosen thanks to its extended and protected rainforest which is home of a large number of flora and fauna species and it also hosts one of the most important Maya archaeological sites. Moreover due to the growing population (around 20.000 inhabitants in the area) and due to its increasing economic activities there are some natural and social issues which need attention; some of them are illegal hunting, poor infrastructures and tourism development and deforestation which can be fought through different initiatives and a proper ecotourism development is seen as a possible solution (The Nature Conservancy, 2016).

In general a wholesome ecolodge would be able to offer new jobs to the locals which simultaneously would preserve their environment. More specifically an ecolodge properly established would be able to act as a catalyst for all the actors within the reserve because, given the problems that exist, this business would have the ability to offer new jobs to people in the area as receptionists, waiters, cooks, raw material suppliers and local artisans. Moreover other jobs would be offered for the preservation and improvement of the reserve under the natural point of view and this would help to mitigate the social and natural issues ongoing there.

### 7.3.2 Vision

To become an elite ecolodge, capable at the same time to improve the economic, social and environmental situation in the surrounding area. Business success goes

hand in hand with the growth of the locals welfare and the natural preservation. Conservation, learning, training and sustainable development are the key words.

### 7.3.3 Mission

The mission is to offer guests a unique experience from a natural, cultural and social point of view. This is possible thanks to the surrounding natural environment and the help provided by the local people who, through their knowledge, are able to offer tourists an unforgettable vacation based on sustainable principles. The aim is to restore an equilibrium where people's needs and environmental requirements are fulfilled.

### 7.3.4 Core values

- Social responsibility: enhancement of the local community wellbeing through numerous and concrete actions, fair wages and treatment of employees, direct participation of the locals in the business operations.
- Environmental responsibility: preservation and improvement of the surrounding ecosystem and minimal environmental impact of the lodge and its activities.
- High customer service: offering a unique and constructive experience to guests, qualified staff, updated services and activities.
- Cooperation: mutual collaboration is not only meant among the business and its employees but it has to be seen in a more extended way where the locals give their contribution to the lodge and vice versa; the same vision of cooperation has to be carried on with local organizations, NGOs, non-profit institutions and so on since the wider and wholesome the participation among stakeholder is, the stronger and more stable the business becomes.
- Training and learning as constant goal: not only for the local community but for guests as well.

### 7.3.5 General facts and figures

- The ecolodge is initially composed by 15 units (7 bungalows, 7 units elevated from the ground in order to minimize the soil impact and 1 villa) and each unit is furnished with a personal solar panel system and possibly a rain harvest system.

- All the structure is built with recycled materials and it uses upcycled furniture; no cement, concrete or other invasive substance is utilized and no trees are removed unless it is strictly necessary.
- One restaurant offers local food prepared in the traditional way; a private garden with local herbs and vegetables and an orchard with typical fruits are also part of the project.
- Cooperation with local municipality (Calakmul), institutions and local organizations (The Nature Conservancy, Tropical Rural Latinoamericana, Pronatura Peninsula de Yucatán).
- To start there are 18 employees hired just for the lodge activities (3 receptionists, 3 housekeepers, 4 cooks/kitchen hands, 2 waiters, 1 gardener, 1 maintainer, 4 guides).

## 7.4 Project key factors

### 7.4.1 Predevelopment and construction phase

In the pre development phase some important initial steps have been defined for both, the local community and the environment. In regard the first one a positive initiative is the involvement of the community's relevant people and the municipality in a prior discussion which, as suggested in the Campi ya Kanzi case study, is able to build mutual trust and it can be a powerful tool for understanding the social and environmental issues and the possible solutions to those problems (IUCN Business and Biodiversity Programme, 2012). Without a relationship of mutual reliance and support in fact, it is more difficult to develop a project of this magnitude, especially when considering that this is not a normal accommodation but rather it is business intensely intersected with the surrounding area from the economic, social and environmental perspective. Performing an environmental impact assessment (EIA) is fundamental in order to know about the local environment and possible risks and figure out how to proceed with the buildings design, energy management, water supply and water-waste management (or a Preliminary Environmental Report as in Soneva Fushi example). Along with the impact assessment, annual reports and monitoring are required as soon as the development phase is established and the operational one begins (The International Finance Corporation, 2004). Moreover, as obtained in most of the interviews and case studies, an important goal is to minimize the soil removal, the eradication of trees and vegetation and in general the impact on the nature.

### 7.4.2 Sustainable construction material and local labor

The usage of sustainable local materials which have possibly been recycled is relevant for a proper implementation. As in Chumbe Ecolodge, Kittitian Hill and so on the aim is to build only with native raw materials reused from the excavation phase or locally purchased from sustainable sellers. The same importance is given to the direct locals participation at the construction and, it is assumed, not just to give them the possibility to work but in a more extended vision let them bring their knowledge and traditions in order to build the ecolodge in the most authentic way possible. The buildings in fact, as in Chumbe Ecolodge, should follow local tradition styles and, as in Isla Palenque ecolodge, they should have a minimum visual impact in the surrounding natural environment. Even the construction of raised corridors that connect the units, as suggested, would help a lot to reduce the exploitation of the surrounding areas and therefore the visual impact; overall an equilibrium between the ecolodge structure and the vegetation is important.

### 7.4.3 Energy consumption

Energy consumption is an extremely important part because a well developed energy management plan is able to provide a consistent cost reduction in the long-run while decreasing substantially the environmental footprint. Solar panels usage, low energy consumption machineries (washing machines, fridges), led bulbs and use of electric vehicles are some of the numerous initiatives able to offer a drastic reduction of energy.

### 7.4.4 Waste and water management

Managing properly waste and water is also a central aspect; in regard the first one, it is necessary to create a proper recycling method during the construction and the operational phase as well. Reusing materials and separation of waste have positive outcomes since it decreases the environmental impact and it also ensures a cost reduction in the long-run. Conscientious water management is also carried on through a rain harvesting system which provides water for toilets and showers and, as suggested in Campi ya Kanzi case study, greywater and blackwater can be treated using anaerobic reaction and filtration that would limitate the environmental damage (IUCN Business and Biodiversity Programme, 2012).



### 7.4.5 Environmental preservation

The protection of the surrounding environment is a mandatory aspect which deserves attention. Given the high level of biodiversity in the area and at the same time the problems of illegal hunting and excessive deforestation, the environmental commitment must be very high. Initially it is recommended to figure out the ongoing problems and which of them have priority; in the second place, as in the case of Inkaterra, inventories capable to offer information about animal and plant species in the area should be created. Certainly cooperation with local organizations is useful and practicable; for instance The Nature Conservancy that works with local people to improve their conditions of life through sustainable forest management and other activities, Tropical Rural Latinoamericana which evaluates the forest certification criteria for the Maya forest in Mexico and Pronatura Península de Yucatán that is strongly focused on mitigation of deforestation through various activities such as eco-tourism (The Nature Conservancy, 2016). Without forgetting the direct cooperation that has to be planned with the local population that is simultaneously the “tool” and the target for a sustainable development in the area. Thus some important initiatives, linked to the local needs are:

- Natural and cultural activities for guests that have to provide them a certain grade of instruction about the importance of sustainability (Maya site and forest excursions, birdwatching, direct interactions with local community).
- Create laboratories for studying and managing the surrounding ecosystem.
- Organize and promote events and activities aiming at sensitize the local community. to protect the local environment (especially in schools and universities if possible).
- Offer scholarships and grants to deserving students that are studying in eco sustainable field.
- Hire park rangers able to mitigate the illegal hunting issue; monitoring in general.

### 7.4.6 Cooperation with local community

Cooperate with and support the local community is another key aspect for a successful implementation; according to The Nature Conservancy (2016) there are more than 20,000 people around Calakmul, living in ejidos (communities living in communal lands) which are strictly related and dependent to the forest. The project

is in fact based on the collaboration with these locals in a way that they enhance their social and economic well-being through the environmental preservation; the case studies related to Seven Spirit Bay, Surama Ecolodge and Campi ya Kanzi showed that, by establishing a relationship of mutual trust with the local community and by directly entrusting them the commitment to preserve the surrounding nature, the guardianship of the ecosystem is higher. Certainly these ecolodges differ from the one proposed in this business plan as they are directly operated by the community, but they offer a closer look on how to organize positive initiatives for both the community and the ecosystem; and these activities can also be replicated in a private business as long as it ensures the willingness to pursue a sustainable development. Nevertheless most of the other examples analysed in the case studies and interviews offer as well significant practices and actions linked to the community welfare. The Nature Conservancy for instance is already working with the ejidos with sustainable forestry and tourism-based programmes and the implementation of a wholesome ecolodge, working along with the other organizations and the community, can improve and spread these practices faster (The Nature Conservancy 2016). Some helpful steps are:

- Instaurate mutual trustness with the community.
- Create job positions, not just in the lodge but also for the environmental protection.
- Ensure fair wages and fair work conditions and offer almost the totality of job positions to locals only.
- Purchase from the community only sustainable raw materials and goods.
- Organize events, charity and donations aiming at increase the social welfare (construction of facilities and infrastructures, scholarships).
- Create an organization, in cooperation with the others already existent, able to coordinate all those actions related to cultural preservation (linked with the Maya site as well) and social enhancement.
- Train and instruct local people and incite them to work on their craft activities.

#### 7.4.7 Learning and training

Conservation laboratories and training programmes (as in Banyan Tree case study), workshops and scientific research (as in Inkaterra interview) are an

interesting tool for local communities enhancement and guests sensitization about certain issues and these actions help for an easier and stronger expansion of the eco sustainable moral. Ignorance is most of the times the driving factor of many negative habits and actions thus a proper training of local community would have many positive outcomes such as awareness of certain problems and concrete actions to prevent or solve these problems; furthermore they can receive practical and detailed working knowledge which, especially in developing countries is really important to get other job positions. Sensibilization, in general for locals and guests, is finally fundamental for spreading through the various level of society the importance of a sustainable development mind set.

#### 7.4.8 Importance of technological improvements

Technological improvements play a notable role as they are able to mitigate the ecological footprint and reduce the long-run costs as well. The examples offered in the case studies and interviews show a high interest for improvements as Kittitian Hill aims to become totally carbon neutral by 2020 or Banyan Tree which for instance switched ferries engines from gasoline to electric ones. Moreover such technological betterments enhance the lodge competitiveness as new environmentally friendly practices are always welcomed among eco tourists.

## 8 Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to understand if and how an ecolodge can be considered a successful business model where "successful" is meant as a general process in which the main beneficiaries are the local community, the surrounding habitat and finally the entrepreneur; the analysis of the entrepreneur personal enrichment in fact has never been a predominant characteristic of this work. From a strictly financial point of view, the data collected were not particularly exhaustive at least in regard revenues; nevertheless the main philosophy of ecolodges is not to make as much money as possible but rather it is based on sharing in the long-run their earnings in favor of the community and the nature. It is also important to state that many accommodations have been operating for many years or decades, and this has been assumed as symptom of a healthy and successful financial condition. The fact that numerous environmental, social and economic activities have been carried out over the years, is a further indicator which can show that the ecolodges financial situation is solid. Indeed it has been shown that a proper sustainable development of an ecolodge has the potential to ensure enough benefits for every stakeholder.

Moreover an important consideration has to be made about the heterogeneity of the accommodations as they all offer relevant and useful information despite their size, position and structure; infact even though some case studies examples such as Banyan Tree and Soneva Fushi do not really follow ecolodges standards, they serve interesting practices linked to environmental protection and corporate social responsibility which first can be applied for ecolodges and second they show that even bigger organizations have the capabilities to act in a sustainable way. Results have however ruled that overall there is a positive relationship between the ecolodges analyzed and the improved social, economic and environmental conditions of the area in which they operate. The three research questions have also found an important degree of fulfillment since all those requirements necessary for a proper implementation have been reported as well as all the potential benefits for the local population and the environment which explain why they have to be considered as a new suitable type of accommodation.

In conclusion it is also important to state that every country, region or destination has its peculiarities and issues that have to be taken under consideration; not all the successful actions carried on in a certain area have automatically concrete outcomes

whether they are implemented in another one. Thus one of the most important aspects is to deeply analyze all the ongoing circumstances and be able to find positive ways to act, where “positive” is not only seen as a pure economic profit for the entrepreneur but rather it has a more noble meaning where everyone will benefit from those actions. Ecolodges and more in general ecotourism have the capacity to ensure, in the long-run, such overall welfare for the local population, the environment and the entrepreneur himself. Acting responsibly towards a certain local community and its environment have the potential to provide a stronger framework for the accommodation within the area and opportunities for each stakeholder seem to be greater than limitations. Nowadays real ecotourism and sustainable businesses are becoming more and more important worldwide and ecolodges have the capabilities to act as role model for the development of a conscientious and valuable way to travel.

## 8.1 Limitations and further research

Considering the nature of this thesis and the chosen field of research, some limitations that have been encountered are:

- All the notions gained have been obtained through previous researches and studies and there is no actual on-field research; this is a valid motivation for proceed with further investigation which can be performed in a more practical way.
- Under a financial point of view the businesses did not inform about their performances and this can be considered a limitation in understanding their economical status; nevertheless as stated before most of them they operate since many years and carried out certain type of operations which need a certain financial solidity.
- Ecotourism and more particularly ecolodges are rather new fields of tourism and even though they are continuously expanding, they have not a long history behind them; literature and research already offer a lot of knowledge but they are still spreading and increasing worldwide.

## 8.2 Contribution to knowledge

The personal contribution has been relevant especially in regard the personal assessment of sustainability of case studies and interviews (chapter 6) and the final business plan (chapter 7) which was performed in order to offer a conclusive and holistic approach for the development of an ecolodge. Certainly the information and

criteria used for the business plan are the result of the theoretical research and knowledge gained through the study but the final outcome is a personal concrete summary which can be used as general pattern.

### 8.3 Future research

Future research will be performed and it will rely on the limitations described above; since the ecotourism field related to eco-accommodations is still in a development process, in-depth studies are likely to be performed; one of the goals in the future is to conduct these studies directly on-field in order to obtain direct and concrete notions and experiences about ecolodges. Such researches would be able to offer detailed and complete information about how these businesses work in reality and besides the environmental and social aspects (which still remain the most important ones) will be also possible to obtain more financial data.

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# Appendix

INTERVIEW 1: KITTITIAN HILL, CARIBBEANS

RESPONDENT: MESHACH ALFORD, BELLE MONT FARM MANAGER

- Which are general facts and figures of the eco-resort (or ecolodge)? (size, position, number of units/guests, opening year)?

I will start by giving you a little bit of background. Our Island was primarily a sugar based economy until 2005, sugar was the main product, it was a monocultural production and one crop took most of the land; it is a small island in eastern Caribbean (Leeward Island) so most of our development was around sugar export itself and when we lost preferential achievement for sugar in the European market, it signaled the time for the diversification of economy and society and this was one of the projects that was decided under the National Physical Development Plan for the island in term of charting a new future for the next 15 to 20 years. One of the challenges when you have a monocultural system is that everything is tight into it, your social life and the economy. It made us highly sugar export oriented and food import oriented and it created a high vulnerability on a island jurisdiction such as this one. For that reason we came with a new development of the island: how can we move away from sugar and being a more diversified and less vulnerable country? This development of Kittitian Hill has 400 acres it is in a small rural community in the mountains called Saint Pauls.

Kittitian Hill so it is not just a resort, rather it is a 400 acres farm with a resort on it and currently we have 30 guests rooms availables and 3 villas, and people already came here previously but our official opening for guests was last season in December 2015 and the development started back in 2008/2009.

Our philosophy is very simple and it relies on the long term sustainable development of caribbeans which is the responsibility of its people; we believe that our current resorts model in the caribbeans do not truly focus on the consensus both on the local people and the environment. We recognize that is not easy because we must change not just the economy but also the social and environmental aspect of this country and its vision. Moreover more than one third of the resorts expenditure is needed for food and beverage that

was not (initially) provided by the locals so Kittitian Hill is trying to create a better link between agriculture, tourism and the people. In other words how can we bring society and agriculture in the way that guests have a good experience and the locals can enjoy the benefits while at the same time protecting the local environment.

- Which eco practices have been adopted in both construction and management phases?

The golf court was designed by Ian Woosnam, a Welsh professional golf player turned into a golf court designer and the design was in such way to have the least impact possible on the environment so he decided to use the natural characteristics that were already available. Surely there were more challenges but it resulted in less environmental damage and it got the certification from the Golf Environment Organization; it is 100% organic that means we don't use any chemical fertilizer and pesticide and we have to take off weed by hand so it is labor intense but more sustainable; there is also a programme carried on with some professional golf players teaching some guys of the community in order to instruct them for the future guests.

There was minimal excavation made in such way that we did not remove trees and where we had to make excavation the material was reused on the site (like rocks and stones to build the structures); so the golf court was made with the minimum use of material and the maximum local labour help.

We have planted areas with tropical fruits because remember we are a farm and all the land is productive.

In term of construction the aim was to minimize the environmental impact and maximize the local labor so we worked with numerous local contractors with an overall number of six hundred contracts signed since the construction phase started and it was possible only thanks to the design we chose; the excavation was limited and the design of the buildings was strictly developed with the caribbeans style (in order to involve the local community and use their skills developed over the years) with high roofs for a better ventilation and all the materials came from the island or other caribbean islands.

Another eco practice for instance is the paints used which are milked base.

- In which ways do you consider the eco-resort as sustainable?

Over the years we have improved a lot the landscape by planting more than 17.000 trees with over 100 varieties of mango and in general our aim is to use valuable plants such as fruit or medical trees and plants that can be used

in the community and the resort. We have the aim to be 100% renewable energy dependent by 2020 thanks to wind, solar and biodiesel power. We are not destroying nature but actually we are enhancing it, we are sustainable in the social front with a significant number of local workers hired in the operational phase; in 2014 the people directly employed in the business were 529 working in administration, management, engineering, officer and in this figure small contractors are not included.

- How local population is involved in the eco-resort activities? What they do? Which benefits they have?
  - Employment
  - Local farmers benefit from our food journey and our food procurement policies. 90 percent of all food ingredients served at our restaurants come from our onsite farm, local farmers and fishers. This ensures that we remain true to the promises of a truly farm to table fine dining experience at Belle Mont Farm (Kittitian Hill). Our local food supplies enjoy a guaranteed market for their produce at above market price.
- Are there initiatives sponsored by the eco-resort (fundraising, infrastructures projects, charity) for enhancing the population wellbeing?
  - Yearly Christmas party for children in the community
  - Sponsored over 200 hundred tropical fruit/food trees to the local tree planting program.
  - Staff Volunteers on critical development committees offering expertise at no cost.
  - Repair work on the local primary schools in the communities downstream of the development and outfitted them with computer labs.
  - Annual sponsorship to the local community basketball club.
  - Beach cleanup activities every quarter
- How partnerships with other structures, NGO's, public sector and organizations are necessary for the implementation of a wholesome business model? Why?

For example a current staffer is the recently elected president of the Local Tourism Board. In addition, the sustainability manager volunteers on two local committees (The UN-Small Grants Program and a Local inter agency committee on water conservation).

- Does your business bring more economical, social and environmental benefits compared to a normal hotel or resort? How?

Yes. We start with holistic sustainability as the foundation goal in mind, challenging the economic, social and ecological concerns that are normally associated with current resort development models of the Caribbean region. Most other resorts start with profit in mind then all other elements including local community may come after.

- Have you ever had political or institutional pressures that tried to contrast the implementation of your business?

NOT ANSWERED

- How ecotourism certifications are helpful? In which ways are they important for the business, guests and other stakeholders?

Kittitian Hill has achieved various accolades including the Geo-Golf Development Status award. However, the development is not limited by the criteria and standards of these awarding agencies. KH development is about redefining the boundaries and rules of development in the Caribbean. The awards are welcomed but they aren't the focus. Our purpose is to bring together art and culture, society and the economy to give our locals and guest a memorable and unique experience while ensuring the integrity of our environment benefits therefrom are experienced equitably by the local people.

## INTERVIEW 2: CANOPY TOWER, PANAMA

RESPONDENT: RAUL ARIAS DE PARA (OWNER)

- Which are general facts and figures of the eco-resort (or ecolodge)? (size, position, number of units/guests, opening year)?

I have three ecolodges

Canopy Tower 12 rooms, 1999

Canopy Lodge, 12 rooms, 2005

Canopy Camp, 8 rooms, 2014

- Which eco practices have been adopted in both construction and management phases?

Our website has a full page on our sustainability commitment <http://www.canopytower.com/Commitments>.

According to Canopy Family (2016) “In order to make our actions consistent with our love of nature, we must do all we can to protect the global ecosystem. We do this by examining all aspects of the Canopy Family business (and in our personal lives) and determine which areas can be done in a more sustainable fashion. I have seen how difficult it is to put these practices to work in an often wasteful culture and know first-hand that progress can be slow. Fortunately, I have an opportunity to voice the importance of living sustainably on a national scale by being Vice President of ANCON, the oldest and most important conservation organization in Panama; President of Fundacion AVIFAUNA, Creator and Operator of the Panama Rainforest Discovery Center on Pipeline Road; and Board Member of ADESVA, a local conservation and community organization in El Valle de Anton.”

- In which ways do you consider the eco-resort as sustainable?

It does not deplete the natural resources.

- How local population is involved in the eco-resort activities? What they do? Which benefits they have?

In several layers:

1. employees
2. providers of goods and services
3. enhancement of their opinion about nature

- Are there initiatives sponsored by the eco-resort (fundraising, infrastructures projects, charity) for enhancing the population wellbeing?

Many, help in fixing roads, repairing local aqueducts, schools, sport teams

- How partnerships with other structures, NGO's, public sector and organizations are necessary for the implementation of a wholesome business model? Why?

It helps but you can do it alone.

- Does your business bring more economical, social and environmental benefits compared to a normal hotel or resort? How?

Have you heard about “leakages” in the tourism sector? There is the answer to your question



Please see these publications:

Edward G. Sanders and Elizabeth Halpenny, The Business of Ecolodges (A Survey of Ecolodge Economics and Finance, THE INTERNATIONAL ECOTOURISM SOCIETY, Burlington, Vermont, 2001

David Diaz Benavides, The Sustainability of International Tourism in Developing Countries, ORGANIZATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT, Seminar on Tourism Policy and Economic Growth, Berlin, 6-7 March, 2001

Tourism and Development in the Least Developed Countries, UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT, 14 March, 2001

Phillip Evans, Recent Developments in Trade and Competition Issues in the Services Sector: A Review of Practices in Travel and Tourism, UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT

Diego de la Torre de la Piedra, Formas Creativas y Eticas para Generar Ventajas Competitivas en el Siglo XXI, CENTRO EMPRESARIAL DE INVERSIÓN SOCIAL, Foro Empresarial, Panamá, 11 de Septiembre del 2001

Carlos Arturo Angel, La Empresa de la Economía del Siglo XXI, CENTRO EMPRESARIAL DE INVERSIÓN SOCIAL, Foro Empresarial, Panamá, 11 de Septiembre del 2001

- Have you ever had political or institutional pressures that tried to contrast the implementation of your business?

NO

- How ecotourism certifications are helpful? In which ways are they important for the business, guests and other stakeholders?

There are no ecotourism certifications in Panama. I don't know how they could help us or hinder us.

INTERVIEW 3: NULI SAPI, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

RESPONDENT: KAYLEIGH COLBRAN (OWNER)

- Which are general facts and figures of the eco-resort (or ecolodge)? (size, position, number of units/guests, opening year)?

THE LODGE IS SET AMONGST MANGROVES IN A TIDAL INLET. I DO NOT KNOW THE EXACT AREA MEASUREMENT. THERE ARE 4 BUNGALOWS, A RESTAURANT AND WINEHAUS(COMMUNAL OUTDOOR AREA). THESE ARE ALL LINKED VIA A BOARDWALK. MAXIMUM NUMBER OF GUESTS AT ONE TIME IS 8. WE OPENED IN 2012.

- Which eco practices have been adopted in both construction and management phases?

WE USED SUSTAINABLE BUSH MATERIALS SUCH AS SAGO, NATIVE TREES AND VINES TO CONSTRUCT THE BUILDINGS. WE USE SOLAR POWER. THE LODGE WAS BUILT AMONGST THE EXISTING VEGETATION. NO TREES WERE REMOVED DURING CONSTRUCTION.

- In which ways do you consider the eco-resort as sustainable?

MATERIALS FOR REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE ARE LOCALLY AVAILABLE AND SUSTAINABLE. THE KNOWLEDGE OF WHERE TO SOURCE THEM AND HOW TO USE THEM IS BEING TAUGHT AND PASSED ON TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE BY ELDERS.

- How local population is involved in the eco-resort activities? What they do? Which benefits they have?

THE LOCAL PEOPLE ARE EMPLOYED IN THE AREAS OF MAINTENANCE, HOUSEKEEPING, KITCHEN, BAR, TOUR GUIDES, DINGHY OPERATORS AND SECURITY. WE PURCHASE FRESH PRODUCTS AND SEAFOOD FROM LOCAL PEOPLE. WE ALSO DONATE MONEY AND RESOURCES TO LOCAL SCHOOLS AND CHURCHES.

- Are there initiatives sponsored by the eco-resort (fundraising, infrastructures projects, charity) for enhancing the population wellbeing?

AS ABOVE IN REGARDS TO THE SCHOOLS AND CHURCHES.

- How partnerships with other structures, NGO's, public sector and organizations are necessary for the implementation of a wholesome business model? Why?

WE ARE A FULLY INDEPENDENT BUSINESS AND HAVE NOT PARTNERED WITH ANY OTHER SECTOR. THIS IS DUE TO THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA.

- Does your business bring more economical, social and environmental benefits compared to a normal hotel or resort? How?

YES. ECONOMICALLY SPEAKING WE PAY HIGHER WAGES THAN HOTELS/RESORTS IN THE TOWNS. THE EMPLOYEES ARE ABLE TO USE THEIR EARNINGS WITHIN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY WITHOUT THE COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH LIVING IN A TOWN. SOCIALLY, THE EMPLOYEES ARE ABLE TO CONTINUE LIVING WITHIN THEIR VILLAGE, WITH THEIR FAMILY AND DO NOT HAVE TO TRAVEL ELSEWHERE FOR EMPLOYMENT. ENVIRONMENTALLY, WE HAVE MUCH HIGHER STANDARDS OF SUSTAINABILITY THAN MANY OTHER HOTELS. EG: ORGANIC WASTE USED AS COMPOST, CORRECT METHODS OF RUBBISH DISPOSAL, SUSTAINABLE BUILDING MATERIALS.

- Have you ever had political or institutional pressures that tried to contrast the implementation of your business?

NO

- How ecotourism certifications are helpful? In which ways are they important for the business, guests and other stakeholders?

THEY ARE HELPFUL FOR GUESTS AS MORE PEOPLE IN THE DEVELOPED WORLD BECOME AWARE OF THE NEED FOR THIS TYPE OF BUSINESS MODEL. IT IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT FOR THE VILLAGERS AND LOCAL PEOPLE GENERALLY AS A MEANS OF EDUCATION. THIS HELPS THEM TO UNDERSTAND THE NEED FOR ECOTOURISM AS A MEANS OF PROTECTING THEIR ENVIRONMENT AND THEIR FUTURE.

#### INTERVIEW 4: INKATERRA, PERU

RESPONDENTS: GABRIEL MESETH (MANAGER) AND MICHELE BARTON (MANAGER)

- Which are general facts and figures of the eco-resort (or ecolodge)? (size, position, number of units/guests, opening year)?

Inkaterra is celebrating its 40th anniversary as it was established in 1975 when the owner founded the first ecolodge in Madre de Dios with the main

idea of offer a sense of authenticity and sustainability, it was a really pioneering concept. It was built with native materials following the native culture and since 1978 Inkaterra started performing flora and fauna inventories and the purpose was to know what was out there in order to find out the best conservation initiatives, make it profitable for the local communities, create value and create job positions for the locals.

The following link includes Inkaterra introduction: its origins, areas of influence, research & conservation projects, and awards. The menu includes its sustainability policy: <http://www.inkaterra.com/our-company/http://www.inkaterra.com/our-company/>

<http://www.inkaterra.com/our-company/>

Here is a link with the bio of Founder & CEO José Koechlin: <http://www.inkaterra.com/our-company/our-founder/http://www.inkaterra.com/our-company/our-founder/http://www.inkaterra.com/our-company/our-founder/>

Inkaterra is devoted to scientific research, conservation, education and the sustainable development of local communities. Flora and fauna inventories are performed to define natural areas where hotels are established. This baseline allows Inkaterra to compare its own long-term impact over nature.

NGO Inkaterra Asociación manages these initiatives: <http://www.inkaterra-asociacion.org/http://www.inkaterra-asociacion.org/>

- Which eco practices have been adopted in both construction and management phases?

Hotels are built with native materials, designed inspired by local cultures, and green operations practiced to use water and other resources in an efficient way. Please go to Inkaterra Hotels page at [www.inkaterra.comhttp://www.inkaterra.com](http://www.inkaterra.comhttp://www.inkaterra.com)

- In which ways do you consider the eco-resort as sustainable?

Profitable conservation has a positive impact on biodiversity and contributed to the economic growth of local communities. Natural and cultural values are shared with the world through authentic travel experiences.

- How local population is involved in the eco-resort activities? What they do? Which benefits they have? Are there initiatives sponsored by the eco-resort (fundraising, infrastructures projects, charity) for enhancing the population wellbeing?

4000 people from local communities have been trained by Inkaterra since its establishment. Career opportunities on ecotourism, hospitality and field guidance help mitigating migration and to safeguard local cultures. Agroforestry projects are also a source of income that promotes a sustainable supply chain. Workshops are organized to educate on environmental care: <http://www.inkaterra-asociacion.org/education-community/education/projects-activities/schools/>

Three hotel managers are born and raised in local communities:

<http://www.inkaterra.com/our-company/our->

[team/http://www.inkaterra.com/our-company/our-team/](http://www.inkaterra.com/our-company/our-team/)

<http://www.inkaterra.com/our-company/our-team/>

- How partnerships with other structures, NGO's, public sector and organizations are necessary for the implementation of a wholesome business model? Why?

In this case Inkaterra works with NGO Inkaterra Asociación (ITA), self-funded via ecotourism. Scientific research & biodiversity conservation projects managed by ITA help designing authentic travel experiences.

Attached to this email are two case studies: one on the World Birding Rally created by Inkaterra, which has positioned Peru as a top destination for birding. The other is on Peru's first marine reserve in Cabo Blanco, where Inkaterra is developing a new ecotourism project.

- Does your business bring more economical, social and environmental benefits compared to a normal hotel or resort? How?

Its holistic approach helps improving quality of life for every living being: flora, fauna and communities.

- Have you ever had political or institutional pressures that tried to contrast the implementation of your business?

United Nations has declared 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. This significant statement determines ecotourism as an alternative to mitigating the effects of climate change. Ecotourism can be more productive than many extractive industries nowadays, as biodiversity has a social function through the sustainable use of natural resources, which is a way to conserve them.

It is important to realize that the sustainable use of nature can be a profitable endeavor and it has a social function. On the other hand, being committed to

ecotourism completely changes your mindset: it helps you understand that, even results might demand more time, there is no parallel to the fulfillment of outreaching the value of biodiversity. Governments and institutions are becoming more aware about this.

- How ecotourism certifications are helpful? In which ways are they important for the business, guests and other stakeholders?

Ecotourism is such an appealing industry, as it showcases a destination's mega biodiversity. The biggest benefit is to create added value for rural communities while safeguarding the environment, which has brought up a strong positive image and brand recognition.

It has led Inkaterra to be member of alliances such as Relais & Châteaux, Virtuoso and National Geographic Unique Lodges of the World. Inkaterra caters to more than 200,000 travellers annually.

#### INTERVIEW 5: MONTE VELHO, PORTUGAL

RESPONDENT: ARIADNA, MANAGER

"I can tell you that we have 13 rooms, one dorm and a big yoga sala. We are surrounded of pines trees and we developed a protocol where the local people living around are involved.- for instance, they take over the permaculture garden and the catering service.- this involves 10 people from the área. We also have a horseback riding partnership, where six horses are taken care in the property, following our mission of a holistic approach with the society and the nature.

Regarding ONG, Monte Velho is collaborating with the Algarve Waldorf School, that was bornt few years ago and we help with materials, events in our venue, etc."