

## **Ecotourism & strategic management''**

**Stuart Crispin**

**Mark Wickham**

**University of Tasmania**

### **Abstract:**

The aim of this paper is to explore the current state of academic knowledge on the strategic management of ecotourism firms. The ecotourism sector of the tourism industry has grown significantly since the 1960. This growth in practice has been matched by growth in academic interest in ecotourism. While considerable research has been undertaken into the defining ecotourism and understanding its impacts, there is still considerable scope to understand more about how ecotourism firms formulate and implement their strategy. To achieve this, the researchers have undertaken content analysis of the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* – a leading A-ranked journal in the field. This analysis revealed a paucity of knowledge about the processes of strategic management in ecotourism firms, and the types of resources and capabilities necessary to ensure that ecotourism firms are sustainably managed. The paper concludes with a discussion of these findings and suggestions for future areas of research.

## ***Introduction***

Ecotourism is an increasingly important sector of the tourism industry (Nyaupane & Thapa, 2004; Wearing & Neil, 1999; Weaver, 2001). Since the emergence of the environmental movement in the 1960s and 1970s, tourists have demanded, in ever increasing volume, tourism experiences that are based in and around nature and that provide them with education about the environment (Boon, Burridge, & Fluker, 2002; Cater, 1994; Stein, Clark, & Rickards, 2003). Consequently, ever more remote (and natural) destinations have been touched by ecotourism, and there has been significant growth in the amount of tourism product packaged and sold as ecotourism.

Ecotourism has also flourished as an area of academic interest, with many books, journals, and conference dedicated to its study. While researchers have given considerable attention to defining ecotourism, exploring its impacts, the role of accreditation, and macro-level planning and management issues, more attention needs to have been given to the strategic management of ecotourism firms. A common criticism of ecotourism firms is that they have the potential to destroy the natural resource upon which they depend through the attraction of large visitor numbers and poor resource-management strategies (Briassoulis, 2002; Kirstges, 2002). Therefore, ecotourism firms have a critical role to play ensuring the sustainability of this sector of the tourism industry.

The aim of this paper is to explore the current state of academic knowledge on the strategic management of ecotourism firms. To achieve this, the researchers have undertaken content analysis of the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* – a leading A-ranked journal in the field. The paper commences with a review of the ecotourism literature. This is followed by a detailed discussion of the research method, and the findings of data analysis. The paper concluded with a discussion of these findings and suggestions for future areas of research.

## ***Literature Review***

The emergence of ecotourism owes much to the birth of the environmental movement during the 1960s and 1970s. During this period many people became concerned about the demands placed on the environment by humans. As a consequence of the environmental movement, people began to demand that business operated in a more ecologically sound manner (Brulle, 2000; MacDonald, 1998; Stead & Stead, 1996; Welford & Gouldson, 1993). Environmental concerns amongst the World's population increased again after 1987 when the United Nations Commission on Environment and Development published *Our Common Future*, otherwise known as the Brundtland Report (Stead & Stead, 1996). This report

outlined the depth of the World's environmental problems, and promoted the notion of sustainable development as a potential solution to these environmental ills.

With the publication of the Brundtland report consumers began to demand environmentally sustainable products (MacDonald, 1998; Stead & Stead, 1996), and nowhere was this more evident than in the tourism industry (Wearing & Neil, 1999). In this post-Brundtland era, ecotourism boomed as a sustainable option for the tourism industry (Clarke, 1997; Wearing & Neil, 1999). Tourists became increasingly attracted to the idea of ecotourism as it allows them to experience nature, while at the same time having supposedly minimal impact on the physical environment (Bottrill & Pearce, 1995). It should be noted here that tourism has always been dependent on the environment. The environment helps to attract tourists to a destination and serves as a backdrop to other tourism forms. Where ecotourism differs is that a deep understanding and interaction with the physical environment is at the core of the ecotourism experience while in the past nature was seen as peripheral to the tourism experience (Boo, 1990; Burton, 1998).

Although ecotourism is a relatively new concept, it has succeeded in attracting considerable academic attention; so much so that there are two journals (*the Journal of Ecotourism and the Journal of Sustainable Tourism*) dedicated to its study. The crossover that occurs between the environment, the tourist and the economy in ecotourism, means that this attention has been multidisciplinary; drawing on the fields of sociology, ecology, geography, and economics. While this multidisciplinary base has led to a diverse debate on the concept of ecotourism, the debate has primarily been concerned with macro-level issues, such as what is ecotourism, destination planning and resource management, and what drives ecotourism demand. While this debate has occurred, the 'business' of ecotourism has developed into a multi-million dollar industry, and little academic attention has been given to these firms and how they individually are managed to ensure sustainability.

One major area of debate has been over the appropriate definition of ecotourism (Bjork, 2000; Blamey, 1997; Bottrill & Pearce, 1995; Diamantis, 1999; Fennell, 2001). Considerable academic attention has been given to the concept, but as yet a strict definition of the concept does not exist (Fennell, 2001; Lindberg & McKercher, 1997). In fact, new definitions of the concept are constantly being developed to suit the purposes of resource managers and ecotourism developers. Part of the problem has been the battle between those who want ecotourism to be primarily about the environment, and those wanting a stronger focus on social sustainability. The resolution has been to talk about key elements or factors that must be present for an experience to be considered ecotourism (Blamey, 1997; Bottrill &

Pearce, 1995). These elements are nature, education, and sustainability. A move to such a position acknowledges that there is a spectrum of possible ecotourism experiences ranging from soft to hard (Acott, La Trobe, & Howard, 1998).

Ecotourism is certainly nature dependent – with ecotourism experiences occurring in natural settings such as forests, swamps, savannah and waterways. They may focus on particular species of flora and fauna (for example bird watching), geological formations (for example volcanoes and caves), or complete ecosystems. The natural landscape of ecotourism is usually extended to include indigenous people and culture (Dorsey, Steeves, & Porras, 2004). These people are perceived to live a simpler life that is in harmony with the nature environment, and serve as a counterpoint to modern ways of living many ecotourists are use to (Dorsey, Steeves, & Porras, 2004; Robinson, 1999; Zeppel, 1998). There has been some debate about the range of soft and hard ecotourism experiences offered to consumers (Weaver, 2001).

Many proponents of ecotourism argue that the purpose of ecotourism should be to educate people about the natural environment, and to foster within people greater awareness and concern for the environment (Boo, 1990; Buckley, 1994; Higham & Carr, 2002; Page & Dowling, 2002; Wearing & Neil, 1999). Beyond improving cognitive knowledge about the environment, ecotourism should also provide emotional learning – it should help the ecotourist make an emotional and spiritual connection with nature. The ecotourism experience should bring about lasting changes in people's attitudes and behaviour, and hence reduce their impact on the environment upon their return to everyday life. There have been criticisms of the value of education through ecotourism, with some arguing that ecotourism does little other than 'preach to the converted' (Beaumont, 2001)

Ecotourism should also be sustainable - seeking to balance economic, social and environmental needs (De Haas, 2002; Doan, 2000; Page & Dowling, 2002; Weaver, 2001; Wight, 1993). Firstly, ecotourism should provide an economic return to the host community. To ensure the economic benefits are equally shared, ecotourism businesses should be locally owned and employ members of the host community. Ownership gives the host community greater control over the content of the ecotourism experience and the pace of tourism development. It also provides an economic incentive to engage in conservation activities. Secondly, ecotourism should be developed in a socially responsible manner. Local culture and social patterns should be respected, and visitor numbers should be managed to avoid placing pressure on the existing social system. Again, local ownership should help to ensure that ecotourism develops in a manner compatible with the needs and

wants of the host community. Thirdly, ecotourism should operate within natural limits. Therefore, they should have environmental management systems (EMS) in place and limit the scope and scale of their operations to reflect environmental carrying capacity.

Intertwined with the definitional debate has been discussion about the 'validity' of ecotourism as a concept. Many have questioned the actual benefit of ecotourism to the environment and to the host community (Butler, 1990), claiming that it is often a case of 'eco-sell' rather than 'eco-reality' (White, 1993). Honey (1999) is particularly critical of the benefits of ecotourism, citing golfing resorts that are sold as ecotourism product as examples of how the concept has been devalued by operators. Alternately, Akama (1996) sees ecotourism as a form of neo-colonialism, locking up vital habitat for wealthy (white/western) tourists, and preventing locals from accessing these areas for hunting and subsistence farming. As such, it does little do benefit the host community, often breeding resentment and animosity. Others, such as Kirstges (2002) and Krippendorf (1987) takes the debate one step further, arguing that the environmental impacts of mass tourism have been grossly overstated, and that it is often less damaging to the environment than ecotourism. Kirstges (2002) is also critical of the fact that ecotourism often opens up new destinations for tourism. As awareness of these 'new' tourism areas increases, more and more tourism visit the destination. As time passes, the ecotourists leave, to be replaced by mass tourism. As Turner & Ash (1976) and Butler (1980) skillfully demonstrated, this cycle has been repeated time and again at destinations around the world.

On the supply-side of the industry, considerable attention has been given to issues of planning and resource management. Planning research has primarily focused on the need for destination managers to counter negative impacts of ecotourism (Butler, 1980; Farrell & Runyan, 1991; Obua & Harding, 1997; Pigram, 1990). Others have focused on how ecotourism can be used to support conservation activities (Barany, Hammett, Shillington, & Murphy, 2001; Blom, 2000; Bookbinder, Dinerstein, Rijal, Cauley, & Rajouria, 1998; Brown, 1998), and as a tool of regional development (Khan; 1997; May, 1991).

From a resource management perspective, a number of different strategies have been developed. Doorne (2000) explored the notion of destination carrying capacity, and its impact on the tourism experience, arguing that managers needed to carefully determine the carrying capacity of a site before tourism development occurs. Alternately, Beeton & Benfield (2002) argue that destination managers should use demarketing as a tool of environmental management. They argue that demarketing, defined as "...that aspect of marketing that deals with discouraging customers in general or a certain class of customers

in particular on a temporary or permanent basis” (Beeton & Benfield, 2002; 499), should be used to discourage mass tourists from visiting a site, and therefore minimising impacts at the destination. Hardy & Beeton (2001) advocate the use of a stakeholder approach to destination management. Using Tropical North Queensland as a focus, they demonstrate that if sustainability is to be achieved, all stakeholders should be involved in planning. It is only through such a process that all view can be accurately determined, and integrated into an effective destination management plan. Hardy & Beeton (2001) argue that failure to listen to stakeholders causes resentment to tourism development.

From an environmental perspective, Tyler & Dangerfield (1999) argue that ecotourism development should occur within ecological limits, and be based on scientific ecological principles. Tyler & Dangerfield (1999) are critical of the notion of carrying capacity, claiming that management decisions taken from this perspective tend to focus on one or a few dominant species (for example the impact of whale watching on whale populations). Rather, they argue that destination managers need to think about the ecological impacts of ecotourism, and how ecotourism development will fit within the whole ecosystem. Adopting this perspective, the ecosystem, and not individual species, is the tourism resource-base, and should be managed as such. While Tyler & Dangerfield’s (1999) thesis leads to holistic thinking in ecotourism development and planning, there are issues associated with the notion of ecosystem. For example, it is hard to define the ‘boundaries’ of an ecosystem, which potentially makes it harder for developers to determine the impacts of their development. Any boundary that is created is likely to be arbitrary.

Rather than focusing on stakeholders, or the ecological impacts, Boyd & Butler (1996) look at the motivations of the ecotourists, and based on this offer a set of eight criteria that should be considered in planning ecotourism developments. These criteria being accessibility, relationship between ecotourism and other resource uses, other attractions in the region, presence of existing tourism infrastructure, level of user skills and knowledge required, level of social interaction, degree of acceptance of impacts and controls over level of use, and the type of management required to ensure long-term viability. By determining how a destination scores against these criteria, planners can determine the type of ecotourists they will be able to attract, and the type of ecotourism development they should pursue. For example, if a destination is hard to access, has little existing tourism infrastructure, and requires a high level of user skills and knowledge, then ecotourism development should be aimed at the ‘eco-specialist’. Alternately, if a destination is easy to access, has high levels of existing infrastructure, and low skills requirement, then it is more likely to appeal to the ‘eco-generalist’. Such a framework is useful, because it links ecotourists’ motivations to developmental possibilities.

As the proceeding discussion indicates, considerable attention has been given to macro-level issues associated with ecotourism planning and management. However, little attention appears to have been given to the micro-level activities of ecotourism firms. Ecotourism firms are those organizations directly responsible for the provision of ecotourism experiences for ecotourists, and include ecolodges and hotels, private and public reserves, transportation providers, and tour guides/companies. This is an interesting oversight, given that these firms are responsible for operationalising the ecotourism concept into a workable (and hopefully) sustainable product. While macro-level planning is important, it fails to explore how each firm can contribute to, or detract from, the sustainability of the sector as a whole. Given that ecotourism firms service the needs of the ecotourist, their actions have a direct impact on the sustainability of the industry as a whole. It is therefore important that greater attention is given to studying the ecotourism firm.

In particular, little attention has been given to the strategic management of ecotourism firms – especially in the areas of strategy development and implementation, and the strategically relevant resources and capabilities necessary to sustainably operationalise the concept of ecotourism. Given that strategic management is broadly concerned with the alignment of a firm with its environment to ensure sustained advantage (De Wit & Meyer, 1999), it is argued that strategic management should be central to the analysis of the ecotourism firms. It is only by making strategic management central to this study that we will begin to understand how the business of ecotourism can be managed to ensure sustainability.

Therefore, a research opportunity existed to explore the state of academic knowledge on the strategic management of ecotourism firms. In particular to identify what, if any, specific firm-level strategic management issues have been researched and specific gaps in the literature that could be addressed with future research. The specific research question for this study was:

*RQ: What is the current state of academic knowledge on the strategic management of ecotourism firms?*

## **Method**

In order to address the research question, this study undertook an analysis of the leading peer-reviewed sustainable tourism journal as rated by the Australian Research Council (2008) and Harzing's (2009) 'Journal Quality List' (namely:). The *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*

received an A ranking consistently across both rating systems, which indicate that it represents “...the best or leading journal in its field [and] publishes outstanding, original and rigorous research that will shape the field” (Harzing, 2009: 7). According to the journal’s own statements concerning their aims and scope:

The *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* aims to advance critical understanding of the relationships between tourism and sustainable development. The journal publishes theoretical, conceptual and empirical research that explores one or more of the economic, social, cultural, political, organisational or environmental aspects of the subject (Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 2009: 1).

As such, the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* provides a sound basis upon which to content analyse the most outstanding and rigorous sustainable tourism research to be published in the discipline, and to gauge the major trends in academic and practitioner knowledge development over the past decade. Neumann (2003: 219) defines content analysis as “...a technique for gathering and analysing the content of text...content refers to words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes, or nay message that can be communicated”, and is generally based on written or visual materials because they have the capacity to provide rich information about a topic of choice (Neuendorf, 2002). According to Duriau, Reger and Pfarrer (2007), content analysis is a particularly appropriate methodology for gauging research trends, as it facilitates a quasi-longitudinal analysis of comparable journal article publications over time.

The content analysis research undertaken in this study followed the five-stage protocol identified by Finn et al. (2000), Hodson (1999) and Neumann (2003). In the first stage, the aims and objectives of the research were identified, and the first round coding rules were developed. Coding refers to the process of converting information into contextual values for the purposes of data storage, management and analysis allowing theme identification (Tichehurst & Veal, 2000). Using the literature review as a guide, we decided to initially organise the journal article content by demographic variables such as ‘year of publication’, ‘location of researcher’ and ‘topic area’. Using demographic variables as the basis for the first round coding had three main advantages: firstly, it enabled the researchers to populate the journal article database with a high degree of inter-coder reliability. Secondly, it provided a basis for the researchers to manipulate the data more readily later in the analysis process. Thirdly, it provided a protocol upon which the content analysis could be readily replicated by others in the future.

In the second stage of the content analysis, all of the journal’s article publications from 2000 to 2009 were collected electronically from the ProQuest® database. In total, 60 issues of the respective journals were collected, and from these, 313 peer-reviewed articles were



identified as valid for the purposes of answering the research question. Using the first round coding rules discussed above, the valid peer-reviewed research articles were entered into the database. At regular intervals, inter-coder reliability checks were taken to ensure that the data were coded consistently, and to ensure that no valid articles were accidentally omitted from consideration. Table 1 provides summary information about the journal articles that were collected and analysed.

<b>Total Articles Published in 2000-2009:</b>	<b>313</b>
Articles Published on Tourism Operators & Strategy	90 (28.7%)

**Table 1: Summary Information of the Journal Article Population 2000-2009**

In the third stage of the content analysis, the coded data were further interrogated to detect any significant themes that emerged in the articles specifically concerned with tourism operator strategy development for the decade beginning in 2000. The trends and emergent themes detected in the analysis formed the basis for establishing the second round of data categories (see Table 2 the full list of second round coding categories). As was the case in Stage One, the second round of coding rules were developed prior to the coding of the data itself (to maintain a consistent approach between researchers), and to provide a protocol for others to follow should they wish to replicate the analysis.

<b>Articles Published on Tourism Operators &amp; Strategy</b>		<b>90</b>
AND	(No other theme)	20
	Eco-Tourism	21
	Environmental Impacts	11
	Government Policy	9
	Performance Management	7
	Destination Planning and Marketing	8
	Tourist Gaze	2
	Responsible Tourism	2
	Cultural Comparison	2
	Natural Environment	2
	Tourist Motivations	1
	Thana-Tourism	1
	Package Tourism	1
	Business Modelling	1
	Crisis Management	1
	Resident Perceptions	1

**Table 2: Second Round Coding Categories**

In the fourth stage of the content analysis, the second round coding categories were populated with data according to the new coding rules. The interpretation of the data during the second round of coding, and the verification of the conclusions, was facilitated by the use of the NVIVO software package. In the method literature, it has been emphasised that computer software programs such as NVIVO, are of significant value in qualitative analysis and any subsequent theory building (Kelle, 1995; Richards and Richards, 1995; Weitzman and Miles, 1995). Where it was appropriate, data were allocated to more than one node for analysis. Again using the NVIVO software, the contents of each of the initial index nodes were then reviewed to identify common themes that arose in the data.

In the final stage of the content analysis, the results of the second round coding were refined and the research findings finalised. In order to facilitate the theory building process, memos were maintained about the data, their categories, and the relationships between them as they emerged. Designed to store and organise ideas about the data, they were integrated into the analytic process. Wilson suggests that memos assist in the development of theory in five important ways:

1. They require that you move your thinking about the idea to a conceptual level.
2. They summarise the properties of each category so that you can begin to construct operational definitions.
3. They summarise propositions about relationships between categories and their propositions.
4. They begin to integrate categories with networks of other categories.
5. They relate your analysis to other theories (1985: 420).

NVIVO has a facility for the creation and retention of such memos for later consideration and analysis. Utilising the memo capability within the NVIVO package, memo reports were generated by the software after 'stage two' coding. From these reports, the trends and emergent themes became clearer. The themes emanating from the 'second round' coding form the basis of the discussion section that follows.

### **Results and Discussion**

As can be seen from Table 1, there were 313 peer-reviewed articles published in the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* in the years 2000 to 2009. Of these, 90 (28.7%) were identified as having practical and/or theoretical implications for tourism operators and their development of strategy. The 90 articles were distributed across the ten-year period as per table 3 below.

The raw data presented in Table 3 demonstrates a marked increase in the publication of research focused on tourism operators and strategy development post-2005, with the four year period to 2009 accounting for 63.3 per cent (or 56 articles) of the population. This finding indicates a growing interest in researching ecotourism at a firm or business level, and is reflective of a maturing of ecotourism as a field of study. As highlighted in the literature review, early areas of study focused on definitional issues, accreditation, and destination (or ecosystem-level) planning and management. As these issues have been addressed, greater attention has been given to micro-level issues associated with ecotourism firms.

As can be seen from Table 2, the publications identified as having implications for tourism operators and strategy development were associated with a number of important tourism-related research areas. Most prominent was the relationship between tourism operator strategy development and ecotourism operations, which represented 23.3 per cent (21

<b>Articles Published on Tourism Operators &amp; Strategy</b>		<b>90</b>
AND	(No other theme)	20
	Eco-Tourism	21
	Environmental Impacts	11
	Government Policy	9
	Performance Management	7
	Destination Planning and Marketing	8
	Tourist Gaze	2
	Responsible Tourism	2
	Cultural Comparison	2
	Natural Environment	2
	Tourist Motivations	1
	Thana-Tourism	1
	Package Tourism	1
	Business Modelling	1
	Crisis Management	1
	Resident Perceptions	1

articles) of the population. This combined with the focus on 'environmental impacts of tourism activities' accounted for 35.6 per cent (or 32 articles) of the population. This finding is unsurprising, given that nature is an integral part of the ecotourism product, and an understanding of ecotourism's impacts on nature is critical to the sustainability of the sector.

The other related research topic areas of significance included 'government policy development' (i.e. how tourism operators' strategy would be affected by new laws and regulations) 'performance management' (i.e. tools to help tourism operators measure their success), and 'destination planning and marketing' issues. The strong showing for articles about the impact of government policy on strategy (9 articles) is indicative of the fact that ecotourism occurs in highly regulated locales, such as national parks and world heritage areas. In this context, changes in government policy and legislation have a significant impact on the ability of ecotourism firms to implement their strategy. Similarly, the 8 articles on the link between destination planning/marketing and the strategy of ecotourism firms reflect the fact that ecotourism firms have a vested interest in collaborating with other firms and government agencies in the promotion and management of destinations. Ecotourism firms tend to be small businesses, and on their own often find it difficult to attract people to a destination. Therefore, there is an incentive to work with other operators to promote a destination as a whole. Similarly, they need to work with other firms and government agencies within the destination to manage the natural resource base, reducing externalities, and ensure carrying capacities are not breached. Interestingly, only 20 articles were concerned only with tourism operators and their development of strategy.

From 2000 until 2005, second round coding outcomes indicated an exclusive emphasis on descriptive practical implications for tourism operators and their development of strategy (see Table 4 for a summary of this second round coding). A review of these early articles shows a focus on managing environmental impacts (for example carrying capacities and energy use), understanding the nature of the ecotourist (for example visitor perceptions, segmentation and demand management), and training of tour guides. In this early period, no attention was given to the processes ecotourism firms used to develop their strategy, or the specific resources and capabilities needed to ensure their sustainability.

From 2006 until 2009, second round coding outcomes indicated a shift in research emphasis (see Table 5 for a summary of this second round coding). What appears to be emerging is a greater research into some of the resources and capabilities required by ecotourism firms to be competitive. For example, research has explored the role of energy management processes and carbon offsetting as a source of sustainable operations. Greater attention has also been given to the link between effective supply chain management and sustainability, and the process by which a firm can measure and manage their sustainability.

Less attention has been given to government and planning issues, and the nature of segmentation.

While some attention has been given to the strategically relevant resources and capabilities, more needs to be known. To date, there have been no papers published exploring the process by which ecotourism firms develop their strategy, and the factors that influence this process. For example, to ecotourism operators give greater credence to environmental, economic, or social issues in strategic decision making? Similarly, do ecotourism firms use a short or long term planning horizon (an important issue given that many environmental impacts linked to ecotourism take time to occur)? Additional research is needed into the strategically relevant resources of ecotourism firms. For example, do some ecotourism firms enjoy a resource advantage due to the ‘uniqueness’ of the physical environment in which they operate?

<b>Year</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Round Coding: Analysis of implications</b>
2000	Reporting on visitor perceptions of attractions Descriptive of the lessons learnt from effective segmentation Descriptive of the role of part-time tour guides
2001	Reporting on the carrying capacity of tourism sites Reporting on the policy implications of law changes Descriptive of the training requirements of tour guides Reporting on the role of private property in eco-tourism
2002	Modelled sustainable training capacity building Descriptive of measured of environmental impact Descriptive of the lessons learnt from effective segmentation
2003	Descriptive of how to save energy costs Descriptive of environmental impacts of strategy Descriptive of the lessons learnt from effective segmentation
2004	Descriptive of how best to manage fluctuating demand
2005	Descriptive of the advantages of segmenting with surveys Modelled tools to measure branding effectiveness Introduced a stages model of tourism operator sustainability

**Table 4: Second Round Coding Analysis for 2000-2005**

<u>Year</u>	<u>2<sup>nd</sup> Round Coding: Analysis of implications</u>
2006	<p>Report on how to measure market potential</p> <p>Descriptive of how tourism operators report their sustainability</p> <p>Descriptive of how computer models can assist strategy</p> <p>Descriptive of how to acquire 'green certification'</p> <p>Descriptive of the benefits of eco-tourism</p> <p>Descriptive of the greenhouse gas emission research to date</p> <p>Report on the role of public transport as a supporting industry</p> <p>Reported on tourism operators' motivation to 'go green'</p>
2007	<p>Descriptive of the tourists' experience</p> <p>Descriptive of the lessons learnt from effective segmentation</p> <p>Descriptive of the comparison between policy instruments</p> <p>Descriptive of how to minimise the impact on the environment</p> <p>Discusses the branding implications for eco-tourism</p> <p>Discusses how to scan the competitive environment</p> <p>Discusses cross-cultural descriptions of Quality of Life issues</p> <p>Discusses the role of strategy and performance measures</p>
2008	<p>Discusses energy saving tactics</p> <p>Discusses supply chains functions and how to manage them</p> <p>Discusses how to measure sustainability</p> <p>Discusses how to incorporate other tourism operators into the eco-tourism supply chain</p>
2009	<p>Discusses how to tap into perceptions of responsibility</p> <p>Discusses the implications of economic incentives on tourism</p> <p>Discusses measures for determining tourist satisfaction levels</p> <p>Discusses the resources needed for carbon-neutral operations</p> <p>Discusses the resource requirements for Luxury tourism firms</p> <p>Discusses the resource implications for effective governance</p>

**Table 5: Second Round Coding Analysis for 2006-2009**

## **Conclusion**

From content analysis of the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, it was found that 28.7% of all articles published dealt on some level with strategic management issues in ecotourism firms. Most importantly, there has been a significant upswing in interest in recent years, with 63.3% of the articles on strategic management issues coming since the start of 2006. A change in focus also occurred, with a move away from issue such as the impact of government legislation on ecotourism firms and understanding the ecotourist, towards more detailed analysis of resources and capabilities within the firm.

Another interesting finding is that research into the strategic management of ecotourism firms is consistently linked to other, broader, research issues. As shown in Table 2, strategic management research was linked to issues such as environmental impacts, government policy, and destination planning and marketing. Only 20 papers had a sole focus on the strategic management of ecotourism firms. More needs to be known about what happens inside the 'black box' of the ecotourism firm, and there is potential for future research into the issues associated with formulating and implementing business strategy within the context of ecotourism. Strategy represents an attempt by participating firms to operationalise the ecotourism concept – to turn it into a sustainable product that customer (ecotourist) is willing to pay for, and that has minimal impacts on the environment and host community.

In particular, more research is needed into the resources and capabilities possessed by ecotourism firms, and how they are able to use these to develop a sustainable product strategy. As mentioned above, some preliminary research has been undertaken on capabilities such as supply chain management and emissions reduction processes. Other capabilities could include environmental and waste management processes, nature education (a key element of most ecotourism definitions), network development, and marketing. Attention should also be given to resources – in particular the types of natural resources that are critical for success in ecotourism.

While ecotourism is now maturing as a sector of the broader tourism industry, this research indicates that there is still significant potential to advance academic knowledge about the strategic management of ecotourism firms. Such an understanding would help to improve the sustainability of firms within the sector.

## **References**

- Acott, T. G., La Trobe, H. L., & Howard, S. H. 1998. An evaluation of deep ecotourism and shallow ecotourism. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 6 (3): 238-253.
- Akama, J. S. 1996. Western environmental values and nature-based tourism in Kenya. *Tourism Management*, 17 (8): 567-574.
- Australian Research Council. (2008). *ERA Indicator Descriptors*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Barany, M. E., Hammett, A. L., Shillington, L. J. & Murphy, B. R. 2001. The role of private wildlife reserves in Nicaragua's emerging ecotourism industry. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 9 (2): 95-110.
- Beaumont, N. 2001. Ecotourism and the conservation ethic: Recruiting the uninitiated or preaching to the converted? *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 9 (4): 317-341.
- Beeton, S. & Benefield, R. 2002. Demand control: the case for demarketing as a visitor and environmental management tool. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 10 (6): 497-513.
- Bjork, P. 2000. Ecotourism from a conceptual perspective, an extended definition of a unique tourism form. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 2; 189-202.
- Blamey, R. K. 1997. Ecotourism: The search for an operational definition. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 5 (2): 109-130.
- Blom, A. 2000. The monetary impact of tourism on protected area management and the local economy in Dzanga-Sangha (Central African Republic). *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 8 (3): 175-189.
- Boo, E. 1990. *Ecotourism: The Potentials and Pitfalls (Volume 1)*. Washington, DC: World Wildlife Fund.
- Bookbinder, M. P., Dinerstein, E., Rijal, A., Cauley, H., & Rajourai, A. 1998. Ecotourism's support of biodiversity conservation. *Conservation Biology*, 12 (6): 1399-1404.
- Boon, P. I., Burrige, T. R., Fluker, M. 2002. A case for supply-led nature-based tourism within the marine and coastal temperate systems of South-Eastern Australia. *Journal of Ecotourism*, 1 (2/3): 93-103.
- Bottrill, C. G. & Pearce, D. G. 1995. Ecotourism: Towards a key elements approach to operationalising the concept. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 3 (1): 45-54.



- Boyd, S. W. & Butler, R. W. 1996. Managing ecotourism: An opportunity spectrum approach. *Tourism Management*, 17 (8): 557-566.
- Briassoulis, H. 2002. Sustainable tourism and the question of the commons. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29 (4): 1065-1985.
- Brown, D. O. 1998. Debt-funded environmental swaps in Africa: Vehicles for tourism development. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 6 (1): 69-79.
- Bulle, R. J. 2000. *Agency, Democracy, and Nature: The US Environmental Movement from a Critical Theory Perspective*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Buckley, R. 1994. A framework for ecotourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 21: 661-669.
- Burton, R. 1998. Maintaining the quality of ecotourism: Ecotour operators' responses to tourism growth. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 6 (2): 117-142.
- Butler, R. W. 1980. The concept of tourist area cycles of evolution: Implications for management of resources. *Canadian Geographer*, 24 (1): 5-12.
- Butler, R. W. 1990. Alternative tourism: Pious hope or Trojan horse? *Journal of Travel Research*, Winter: 4-45.
- Cater, E. 1994. Introduction – Problems of Definition. In Cater, E. & Lowman, G. (Ed.) 1994. *Ecotourism: A Sustainable Option?* Brisbane: John Wiley & Sons.
- Clarke, J. 1997. A framework of approaches to sustainable tourism. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 5 (3): 224-233.
- De Haas, H. C. 2002. Sustainability of small-scale ecotourism: The case of Niue, South Pacific. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 319-337.
- De Wit, B. & Meyer, R. (Ed.) 1997. *Strategy: Process, Content, Context*. Melbourne: International Thompson Business Press.
- Diamantis, D. 1999. The concept of ecotourism: Evolution and trends. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 2 (2/3): 93-122.
- Doan, T. M. 2000. The effects of ecotourism in developing nations: An analysis of case studies. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 8 (4): 288-304.
- Doorne, S. 2000. Caves, cultures and crowds: carrying capacity meets consumer sovereignty. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 8 (2): 116-130.
- Dorsey, E. R., Steeves, H. L., & Porras, L. E. 2004. Advertising ecotourism on the internet: Commodifying environment and culture. *New Media and Society*, 6 (6): 753-779.

Duriau, V.J., Reger, R.K. & Pfarrer, M.D. (2007). A content analysis of the content analysis literature in organization studies: Research themes, data sources, and methodological refinements. *Organizational Research Methods*. 10(1): 5-34.

Farrell, B. H., & Runyan, D. 1991. Ecology and tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 18: 26-40.

Fennell, D. A. 2001. A content analysis of ecotourism definitions. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 4 (5): 403-421.

Finn, M., Elliot-White, M. & Walton, M. (2000). *Tourism & Leisure Research Methods*. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.

Hardy, A. L. & Beeton, R. J. S. 2001. Sustainable tourism or maintainable tourism: Managing resources for more than average outcomes. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 9 (3): 168-192.

Harzing, A. (2009). *Journal Quality List*. Melbourne: University of Melbourne.

Higham, J. & Carr, A. 2002. Ecotourism visitor experiences in Aotearoa/New Zealand: Challenging the environmental values of visitors in pursuit of pro-environmental behaviour. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 10 (4): 277-294.

Hodson, R. (1999). *Analyzing Documentary Accounts*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Honey, M. 1999. *Ecotourism and Sustainable Development: Who Owns Paradise?* Washington, D.C.: Island Press.

Journal of Sustainable Tourism. (2009). *Home Page*. <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/rsus>. Accessed September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009.

Kelle, U. (1995). *Computer-aided qualitative data analysis: Theory, methods, and practice*. London: Sage Publications.

Khan, M. 1997. Tourism development and dependency theory: Mass tourism vs. ecotourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 24 (4): 988-991.

Kirstges, T. 2002. Basic questions of 'sustainable tourism': Does ecological and socially acceptable tourism have a chance. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 5 (3/4): 173-192.

Krippendorf, J. 1987. *The Holiday Makers: Understanding the Impacts of Leisure and Travel*. London: Heinemann.

Lindberg, K. & McKercher, B. 1997. Ecotourism: A critical overview. *Pacific Tourism Review*, 1: 65-79.

- MacDonald, M. 1998. ***Agendas for Sustainability: Environment and Development into the Twenty-First Century***. London: Routledge.
- May, V. 1991. Tourism, environment and development: Values, sustainability and stewardship. ***Tourism Management***, June: 112-118.
- Neuendorf, K.A. (2002). ***The Content Analysis Guidebook***. Chicago: Sage Publications.
- Neumann, W. (2003). ***Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches***. Boston: Allyn and Bacon Publications.
- Nyaupane, G. P. & Thapa, B. 2004. Evaluation of ecotourism: A comparative assessment in the Annapurna Conservation Area Project, Nepal. ***Journal of Ecotourism***, 3 (1): 20-45.
- Obua, J. & Harding, D. M. 1997. Environmental impacts of ecotourism in Kibale National Park, Uganda. ***Journal of Sustainable Tourism***, 5 (3): 213-223.
- Page, S. J. & Dowling, R. K. 2002. ***Ecotourism***. Sydney: Prentice-Hall.
- Pigram, J. J. 1990. Sustainable tourism – policy considerations. ***Journal of Tourism Studies***, 1 (2): 2-8.
- Richards, T. & Richards, L. (1995). Using computers in qualitative research. In Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (editors). ***Handbook of qualitative research***. California: Sage Publishers.
- Robinson, M. 1999. Collaboration and cultural consent: Refocusing sustainable tourism. ***Journal of Sustainable Tourism***, 7 (3/4): 379-397.
- Stead, W. E. & Stead, J. G. 1996. ***Management for a Small Planet: Strategic Decision Making and the Environment***. London: Sage Publications.
- Stein, T. V., Clark, J. K., & Rickards, J. L. 2003. Assessing nature's role in ecotourism development in Florida: Perspectives of tourism professionals and government decision-makers. ***Journal of Ecotourism***, 2 (3): 155-172.
- Ticehurst, G.W. & Veal, A.J. (2000). ***Business Research Methods: A managerial approach***. Longman: Pearson Education Pty Limited.
- Turner, L. & Ash, J. 1976. ***The Golden Hordes: International Tourism and the Pleasure Periphery***. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Tyler, D. & Dangerfield, J. M. 1999. Ecosystem tourism: A resource-based philosophy for ecotourism. ***Journal of Sustainable Tourism***, 7 (2): 146-158.

Wearing, S. & Neil, J. 1999. ***Ecotourism: Impacts, Potentials and Possibilities***. Melbourne: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Weaver, D. B. 2001b. ***Ecotourism***. Sydney: John Wiley & Sons.

Welford, R. & Gouldson, A. 1993. ***Environmental Management and Business Strategy***. London: Pitman Publishing.

Weitzman E. & Miles, M. (1995). ***Computer Programs for Qualitative Data Analysis***. California: Sage.

Wight, P. A. 1993. Sustainable ecotourism: Balancing economic, environmental, and social goals within an ethical framework. ***Journal of Tourism Studies***, 4 (2): 54-65.

Wilson, H.S. (1985). ***Research in nursing***. USA. Addison-Wesley.

Zeppel, H. 1999. Land and culture: sustainable tourism and indigenous culture. In Hall, C. M. & Lew, A. A. 1998. ***Sustainable Tourism: A Geographical Perspective***. Sydney: Prentice Hall.

**Table 5: Second Round Coding Analysis for 2006-2009**