Defining and Implementing a Socially Sustainable Tourism Certification System in Costa Rica

A Non-Thesis Report

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Abstract

Developing countries require immediate attention in regions of low economic viability to ensure basic needs are being met at both the individual and community level. Many developing countries have established tourism industries that bring in revenues for business owners and investors, but fail to provide positive returns to the community. One model for tourism development focuses on practices that support equity and resilience in these economically disadvantaged communities. The industry has coined the term "Pro-Poor Tourism" to describe this methodology. This research report addresses how to implement Pro-Poor Tourism strategies to improve conditions at both the individual and community level for social sustainability of the region. Costa Rica is used as an exemplary location for this research due to the renowned Certification for Sustainable Tourism program in place that serves as the backdrop for implementing Pro-Poor Tourism (PPT) strategies throughout the country. Development of a PPT certification system is proposed as a means of providing an integrative, unified, and equitable program where tourism business participation is made accessible and relevant, and provides an incentive for implementing PPT strategies. Projected goals for such a certification system are presented and discussed.

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I would also like to thank my program coordinator Lubia Cajas de Gliniewicz for always being available to support my progress through the program. Being a distance student can present its own difficulties, but her immediate assistance with any dilemma made the entire process seamless.

Dedication

To my husband and children, for allowing me to dedicate so much of my time and attention to earning my graduate degree.   We all celebrate this accomplishment together.

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Introduction

Forty-six percent of the world lives below the poverty line and twenty percent below the hunger line, with a shocking sixty-eight percent of poverty related deaths being in children under 5 years old (Komsu 2018). These staggering numbers have pushed poverty reduction to the forefront of international discussions. The United Nations has included in their Sustainable Development Goals for 2030, Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all (Musavengane, 2018). Costa Rica is one such country that is in the trenches fighting for poverty reduction.

Costa Rica has a GDP per capita of $11,630 USD, categorizing it as a developing country ("GDP per capita," 2018). Advancements in levels of education, political stability and economic diversification have elevated Costa Rica to a status of "developing-but-not-yet-developed" in recent years (Andrew, 2011). The government's Bridge to Development program launched in 2015 (Arias, 2015) exemplifies the efforts underway to provide aid to needy families, already showing positive progress in reducing the number of families in poverty or extreme poverty by 2016 (Alvarado, 2017). Development of the country can also be attributed to a rapidly growing sustainable tourism industry. When Costa Rica first began marketing itself as a popular tourist destination in 1997 the GDP per capita was only $3,408 ("GDP per capita," 2018).

In 1996, President Figueres Olsen stated that Costa Rica was "offering itself to the world as a 'laboratory' for this new (sustainable) development paradigm" (Hunt et al,. 2014). Costa Rica is a small country with a big impact on the sustainable tourism community. The country boasts a remarkable abundance of biodiversity for such limited space. Covering only 0.03% of the

landmass of the world, this tiny country is home to 6% of the world's biodiversity (LePree, 2008). Housing an important and sensitive ecosystem comes with great responsibility to protect it. Cattle ranching, oil palm plantations, and agriculture were the leading exports for the country for decades, making up 7% of GDP (Robalino, & Villalobos, 2015). However, these practices all require the clearing of land which led to the loss of more than 50% of the country's forests between 1940-1984 (Broadbent et al., 2012). The government recognized this problem and began putting programs in place to protect the land through the creation of national parks and private reserves. Twenty-eight percent of the land (LePree, 2008) and seventeen percent of the coastal water (Robalino & Villalobos, 2015) in Costa Rica is now permanently protected, making it one of the most protected countries in the world. The Costa Rican government has continued to promote conservation over financial incentives by denying proposed projects such as construction of an international airport in the sensitive Osa Peninsula, and a largescale hydroelectric dam that would destroy thousands of hectares of forest as well as indigenous territories (Hunt et al., 2014).

With such biodiversity, and protection in place to maintain much of it, tourism in Costa Rica experienced an 8-fold increase by 2008 (Blackman et al., 2014) and the hotel sector grew by 400% in the last 25 years (Gomez, 2017). While GDP per capita has increased in this time, over 50% of tourism revenue is never seen by local residents (LePree, 2008). Working with the knowledge that 10% of the world's population owns 70% of the world's income (Komsu 2018), it is the belief of this author that systems can be put in place to redistribute some of this wealth to the impoverished through voluntary actions that benefit all parties involved. This study attempts to design a program that will incentivize hotel owners to incorporate these strategies into their

operations, and will educate tourists on tourism tactics that promote humanitarianism while encouraging them to participate in voluntourism.

Terminology and Approach

It is important to point out that the terminology utilized in this report is based on industry-accepted verbiage and incorporates heavily researched and analyzed methodology. The term 'poor' is used readily to designate individuals and communities residing below the poverty line. While this language appears to lack a people-first viewpoint, it is not applied in a degrading or derogatory manner but is included as a descriptor in the pro-poor tourism field. The term 'pro-poor tourism' indicates that poor individuals and communities are being supported and empowered through strategies implemented by tourism businesses.

The purpose of this report is to develop a system in which communities that lack economic viability can cultivate equity and resilience though partnership with the tourism industry. The goal is to provide the means for employment, empowerment, and sustainable development. This author has designed an original pro-poor tourism certification program, analyzing the theoretical benefits of implementation using the tourism industry in Costa Rica as a case study. This report does not promote utilizing pro-poor tourism as a vessel to justify initial development of rural communities with no previous tourism as this can result in westernization and appropriation of virgin cultures (Gascón, 2015). Instead, this report encourages incorporation of pro-poor tourism strategies into existing tourism industries to improve on the system already in place.

Tourism Background in Costa Rica

Tourists began visiting Costa Rica in droves starting in 1987 after political unrest ended with the Central American Peace Plan, orchestrated by Nobel Peace Prize winner Costa Rican President Oscar Arias Sanchez (Hunt et al., 2014). Tourism is now the leading export for the country, producing 5.3% of national GDP and employing 12% of the country's work force (Gomez, 2017). As tourism increases worldwide, up 25% in the last 10 years (LePree, 2008), developing countries are experiencing the pressures of increased development. Biodiverse countries like Costa Rica are working to mitigate these pressures by implementing plans for sustainable development. The challenge is to reduce damage to ecological, cultural, and socio-economic values while also allowing for continued growth to the tourism sector (LePree, 2008). Ecotourism has been the most accepted method of achieving these goals thus far.
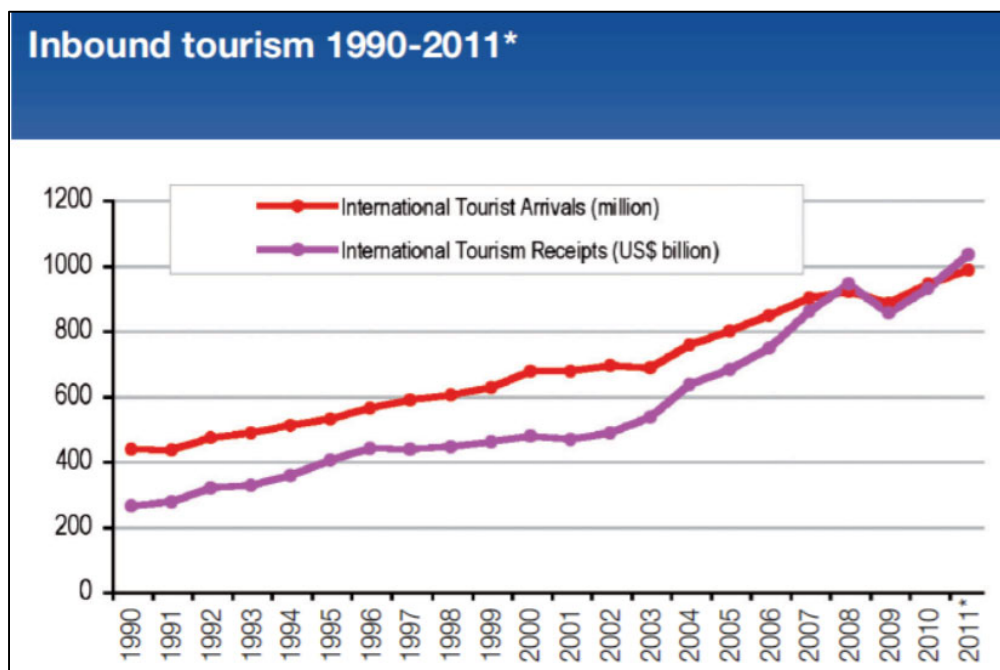
Figure 1 – International tourism activity from 1990 to 2011
Source: World Tourism Organization, 2018

The term 'ecotourism' was first coined in 1983 as a method of tying economic development with environmental conservation (LePree, 2008). Ecotourism is now viewed as a form of sustainable travel. The concept of sustainable travel was born in the Brundtland Report of 1987, defining it as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people" (Hunt et al., 2014). Sustainable tourism, on the other hand, is defined as "an activity that will be able to be practiced by future generations without handicaps or limitations due to the actions of the current generation" (LePree, 2008). Ecotourism is the division of sustainable tourism that includes responsible travel, supports conservation, and improves local communities (Gomez, 2017). Costa Rica is cited as the birthplace of ecotourism ("About Costa Rica," n.d.), but the possible benefits are being recognized worldwide and the field has been increasing 3 times faster than the overall rate of tourism as a whole (Coria & Calfucura, 2012).

Certification for Sustainable Tourism

Ecotourism can be a double-edged sword in that it requires healthy ecosystems for tourists to enjoy, yet development of tourism infrastructure inherently damages said ecosystems (Gomez, 2017). Creation of standards for development is necessary to protect valuable resources and communities. These standards have led to global and national certification schemes for tourism businesses, primarily those providing lodging, of both voluntary and mandatory systems (Gomez, 2017). The Instituto Costarricense de Turismo (ICT) began the government-sponsored Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST) program in Costa Rica in 1997 (LePree, 2008). This national program has had notable success and received global recognition (Blackman et al., 2014), putting Costa Rica at the forefront of sustainable tourism.

Certification for Sustainable Tourism certifies sustainable businesses in all facets of the tourism industry from hotels to tour companies to car rental agencies. Participation in CST is voluntary and requires a third party to perform an assessment of the business. Assessments focus on 4 categories as follows (LePree, 2008):

1. **Physical-biological Parameters**: Evaluates the interaction between the company and the surrounding habitat.

2. **Infrastructure and Services**: Evaluates the management policies and the operation systems within the company and its infrastructure.

3. **External Clients**: Evaluates the interaction of the company with its clients in terms of how much it allows and invites the client to be an active contributor to the company's policies of sustainability.

4. **Socioeconomic Environment**: Evaluates the interaction of the company with local communities and the population in general.

The CST guidelines are clear and explicit in what is being assessed and how certification is awarded (Gomez, 2017). Businesses are evaluated on definitive criteria in each of the 4 categories (criteria are provided to the applicant months before the assessment) and awarded a score of 0 to 5 in each of the categories based on the percent of criteria met for that category. The overall CST rating provided to the establishment is the lowest of the 4 individual category scores. The rigor of this certification process has led to its credibility and eliminates the doubt

that this certification is just another attempt for businesses to greenwash their product (Gomez, 2017).

Although the CST program has received many accolades, it is not without its downfalls as well. The most prevalent critique of the program is that it caters to large scale businesses that have the manpower and funds to implement sustainable changes to the business and to complete the timely application process (Mic & Eagles, 2019). Government support has also tended to be for the development of mass tourism businesses due to the higher employment rates and greater economic returns they provide for country (Blackman et al., 2014; Mic & Eagles, 2019; LePree, 2008; Tao, 2018). The greatest success for truly sustainable ecotourism has been in areas with little to no mass tourism and dominated by smaller ecolodges (Hunt et al., 2014), so this is a problem with the program that must be addressed for it to be successful in the long term.

Another issue that is not directly the fault of the program is the overabundance of other eco labels that confuse and mislead consumers (Gomez, 2017). Opponents claim that greenwashing of ecotourism minimizes the credibility of certification programs. Figure 2 displays 20 seals and certifications based on ecotourism and sustainable travel in Costa Rica alone. Of these, only the first 3 (CST, Blue Flag, and Rainforest Alliance) are recognized by this author as world renowned and highly credible certification programs that are seen repeatedly in research of Costa Rica's ecotourism and environmental sustainability efforts. The challenge of the CST program is to educate consumers on its reliability and to market the label more visibly, making it easier for consumers to identify and discern among the confusion. Although an additional certification is being proposed in this study, this is an original concept as there are currently no community-

based or social sustainability certifications or seals in Costa Rica. All 20 programs in Figure 2

focus on either environmental sustainability, climate change reduction, or overall sustainability

that can include social sustainability aspects within the program.

Figure 2 – Existing eco certification labels in Costa Rica
Source: Gomez, 2017

A Country Brand

A brand is any concept that alerts consumers to the product's qualities or values (Mic & Eagles, 2019). A brand can help the consumer by allowing them to confidently make a purchase decision with ease, and gives the product company an edge over other products. Kleenex, for example, has become a household name and replaced the descriptive word 'tissue' in many consumer's vocabulary. Branding for this company has succeeded in obliterating all competition ("Kleenex," 2016), providing consumers with the assurance that they are getting a quality product without the need to contemplate another brand.

Costa Rica began to brand their product of natural resources and biodiversity in 2013 with the brand name 'esencial Costa Rica' (Essential Costa Rica). The brand was developed to promote tourism, exports, investment, and culture, while integrating the following values: Excellence, Sustainability, Innovation, Social Progress and Costa Rican Origin ("What is the Country Brand," n.d.). The tourism sector of the brand couples the brand name with images of different ecosystems (Figure 3) to exemplify the nature-based origin of their tourism product and invite prospective tourists to experience the country's natural beauty. Place has been firmly established for the country by the 'esencial' brand and highlights of guidebooks and traveler's tales, inspiring travel to the country (Nost, 2013).

Figure 3: Tourism advertisements utilizing the Costa Rica brand
Sources: (1) Calvo, 2018 – (2) "Procomer awards the country brand", n.d. - (3) Abissi, 2018 -
    (4) "The use of the country brand", 2014

The brand is proving to be successful as the tourism sector of the brand currently ranks 9th in the

Americas and 46th in the world (Arias, 2017). Increases in internet searches of the country for

both tourism and investment opportunities is being attributed to the widespread publication of

the brand online, searches being up 23% and 19% respectively (Arias, 2017). Costa Rica is now

seen as an iconic ecotourism destination that many consumers feel confident selecting without

the need to contemplate another destination. The plan of this report is to feed off the brand

marketing already in place for the ecotourist customer base in Costa Rica to incorporate tourism

business practices that will help support local poor communities.

Pro-Poor Tourism (PPT)

As early economic gains of tourism were being realized, world leaders saw the opportunity to use these gains to aid in poverty reduction practices. The UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) developed the Sustainable Tourism for Elimination of Poverty (STEP) program in 2002 (Škrbić, Jegdić, & Milošević, 2018). This program was based on the earlier developed concept of pro-poor tourism that began in the UK in 1990 as a means of utilizing the tourism industry to increase net benefits to the poor (Komsu 2018).

Pro-poor tourism (PPT) functions as an integrated method of tourism development. At its core model it is an adjustment to tourism practices already in place and not an ideal meant to expand the tourism industry; improving the system, not making it bigger (Komsu 2018; Musavengane, 2018; Tao, 2018). The initial versions of this approach to tourism focused only on economic gains for the poor and therefore supported mass tourism over ecotourism due to the great quantity of jobs mass tourism provided (Gascón, 2015). The progressive versions aim to provide instead a net benefit to the poor, the net profit being determined not only by economic gains but also by social, cultural, and environmental improvements (Tao, 2018; Musavengane, 2018). The UNWTO recognizes the following possible influences of PPT on the poor (Komsu 2018):

- Employment by tourism industry
- Sales to tourism industry
- Direct sales to tourists
- Running tourism enterprises
- Tourism tax benefits

- Cultural tourism and voluntourism

- Infrastructure improvements

Employment of members of poor communities within the tourism industry delivers reliable economic gains with possible opportunities for advancement and, in some cases, opportunities offered by employers to learn English. Sales of goods and services generated by members of poor communities to either the tourism industry or directly to tourists promotes individual farming and crafting businesses, development of tourism services, and store ownership. Establishment of tourism businesses by members of the poor community has the potential to produce great returns as well as the possible opportunity to employ other members of the community. Tax benefits received through tourism can be used to improve poor communities, such as development of health and education services and infrastructure. Cultural tourism affords economic gains to the poor community with the added benefit of preservation of cultural practices and education of tourists to these practices. Voluntourism can provide free services to improve poor communities, such as building schools, or support programs/businesses in poor communities, such as helping at sustainable farms. Government investment in infrastructure development in poor communities will provide adequate services to encourage tourism in and near poor communities which will afford all previously discussed PPT opportunities. Each of the previously discussed benefits not only impacts those directly involved, but in turn redistributes profits to other community members when the increased income is spent on purchasing goods and services in the community.

While mass tourism and international investments provide greater profits, they not only cause environmental and cultural damage, but also take profits away from the poor and further exclude locals from entrepreneurial opportunities (Musavengane, 2018; Gascón, 2015). A focus on small locally owned tourism businesses can be successful if it is supported through NGO and government programs offering both financial incentives as well as leadership and business training (Hunt et al., 2014). This promotes the vision of sustainable ecotourism through local socioeconomic gains while maintaining (and hopefully building on) environmental conservation efforts, and can be broadened to include voluntourism and other cultural improvements. Participation of locals in PPT is often lacking though, so a variety of opportunities for them to become engaged must be provided (Tao, 2018). This can range from simple tactics such as use of locally grown/manufactured products by tourism businesses, to more complex systems of agritourism and community-based tourism. The guiding principle of PPT are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: *PPT principles*

Participation: Poor people must participate in tourism decisions if their livelihood priorities are to be reflected in the way tourism is developed.
A holistic livelihoods approach: Recognition of the range of livelihood concerns of the poor (economic, social, and environmental; short-term and long-term).
Balanced approach: Diversity of actions needed, from micro to macro level. Linkages are crucial with wider tourism systems. Complementary products and sectors need to support pro-poor initiatives.
Wide application: Pro-poor principles apply to any tourism segment, though strategies may vary between them (for example between mass tourism and wildlife tourism).
Distribution: Promoting PPT requires some analysis of the distribution of both benefits and costs – and how to influence it.
Flexibility: Blue-print approaches are unlikely to maximise benefits to the poor. The pace or scale of development may need to be adapted; appropriate strategies and positive impacts will take time to develop.
Commercial realism: PPT strategies have to work within the constraints of commercial viability.
Cross-disciplinary learning: As much is untested, learning from experience is essential. PPT also needs to draw on lessons from poverty analysis, environmental management, governance and small enterprise development.

Source: Chok, Macbeth, & Warren, 2007

A Pro-Poor Tourism Certification Program

The remainder of this report will explain how pro-poor tourism can be utilized in Costa Rica in conjunction with the Certification for Sustainable Tourism program (and in other countries with similar certification schemes) to provide socioeconomic benefits to the poor while also promoting sustainable development. Sustainable development requires that it be economically, environmentally, and socially profitable. However, many businesses concentrate on becoming environmentally sustainable and the domain of social sustainability is often overlooked in

sustainability plans. This can lead to failure to achieve CST certification or result in a low certification score. Using CST as the framework for protected growth of tourism businesses that is both economically and environmentally sustainable, incorporating PPT into the scheme delivers the social sustainability aspect. Social sustainability addresses the health and livability of communities by trying to improve the quality of life for residents today and in future generations ("What is Social Sustainability," 2016). Cultural sustainability is not included in definitions for social sustainability and is often seen as its own sector rather than part of the triad of sustainable development, but maintaining cultural practices in areas with indigenous cultures is important to the overall health/livability of those communities and will be included in social sustainability for the purposes of this research.

In order for PPT to be voluntarily participated in by tourism businesses it will need to be advertised as a progressive step in the CST process that can help lead to initial certification or an increased rating if certification is already achieved. It is the belief of this author that a PPT certification system should be put in place to educate business owners on PPT strategies while also incentivizing them to engage in such practices through the benefits of increased profits from the ecotourist customer base and gains in CST certification. The PPT certification can be an independent award separate from CST certification, but this is the nonoptimal approach to the matter as it ignores the need for environmental sustainability in this biologically sensitive region. Ideally the PPT award would be given during the CST certification process to those businesses that employ the advertised PPT strategies to qualify in the Socioeconomic Environment category of the CST application.

Standards for Certification

A comprehensive list of 38 PPT strategies was compiled by the author for use in the proposed

certification process. These strategies are comprised of items from the Socioeconomic

Environment category of the CST application that meet the goals of PPT certification. Of the 61

items in the 5 sections of this category, some were deemed not pertinent to the PPT goals while

others that had multiple pertinent goals were separated into more than one item (Table 2).

Table 2 – Socioeconomic Environment items from the CST application utilized in the creation of
PPT certification standards

Socioeconomic Environment				
Section Number	Section Title	Items in Section	Items with PPT Strategies	Standards for PPT Certification
24	Human Capital Management	13	7	9
25	Indirect Economic Benefits	6	5	6
26	Health	8	5	5
27	Social and Cultural Development	14	14	15
28	Optional Items for Point Recovery	20	3	3

The 38 pro-poor tourism strategies identified for certification are listed below. Each strategy

listed also includes the corresponding related item number from the CST application. Strategies

are organized by genre rather than by the CST item number.

1. 60% of employees are local residents from surrounding communities (24.2)

2. Local residents are employed in administrative roles (24.4)

3. Local residents are employed in management roles (24.4)

4. Equitable hiring of women and minorities (28.13)

5. Provide professional development training (24.3)

6. Provide training to improve lifestyle (E.g., English courses, computer training) (24.3)

7. Provide training in the tourism field to local students or internships for adults (24.5)

8. Hire participants that successfully complete trainings and internships (24.6)

9. Consult the community through surveys every 6 months to assess business impacts (24.8)

10. Provide a process for community members to file complaints or recommendations (24.9)

11. Use locally produced goods during operations (25.1)

12. Use locally produced crafts and artwork to decorate the business (25.3)

13. Sell locally produced goods and handcrafts onsite (25.2)

14. Promote local products and businesses (25.2)

15. Promote recreational activities run by local businesses (27.1)

16. Promote charitable, social, or cultural activities taking place in the community (27.2)

17. Promote community events that spotlight local artisans or businesses (27.12)

18. Promote cultural elements of local communities (27.9)

19. Monitor business sociocultural impacts (27.10)

20. Apply actions to minimize negative business sociocultural impacts (27.11)

21. Donate to community foundations and charities (27.3)

22. Donate funds and/or supplies to local schools (27.3)

23. Donate to community infrastructure or maintenance (27.4)

24. Support community organizations that improve the community (27.5)

25. Support development of sports, arts, and cultural activities in the community (27.6)

26. Allow the use of company facilities for community meetings (27.13)

27. Offer customers reduced rates for domestic tourism activities (27.7)

28. Support at least 3 domestic microenterprises (27.8)

29. Employee volunteer program in place during working hours (27.14)

30. Identify needs in a local community and work to support them (25.5)

31. Perform specific investigations to identify needs in a local community and create action

    plans to support them (25.6)

32. Company has received recognition for community work (28.8)

33. Healthcare of the local community is not harmed by business actions (26.1)

34. Facilitate at least 3 preventative public health programs in the community (26.2)

35. Health benefits are provided in addition to statutory requirements (26.3)

36. Approved occupational health program is reviewed every 2 years (26.4)

37. Occupational health program is monitored by the Occupational Health Council (26.5)

38. Offer employees extra salary incentives (E.g., childcare, performance bonuses) (28.16)

Certification Methods

To reduce complexity such as that seen as a downfall of CST certification process, the PPT

certification process should be a simplified assessment where participation is either awarded or

not awarded. No tiered levels of award should be part of the program. Certification should be

awarded if businesses participate in more than 75% (at least 29) of the 38 PPT advertised

strategies. However, each item on the CST application is assigned a weight of 1-3 points, so

although participation in all 38 items will guarantee a score of 5 in the Socioeconomic category,

there is no way to determine what the category score will be for participation in any 29 or more

PPT strategies. CST certification is also based on the lowest category score received so a business could participate in all 38 PPT strategies to receive the PPT certification and score a 5 in the Socioeconomic category on the CST application but could still end up not qualifying for CST certification or qualify for a low number of leaves due to deficiencies in one or more of the other 3 categories.

A new certification scheme is not going to receive government support until it has been shown to be effective and credible. The program must therefore be run by an NGO until such time for government support occurs (if ever). The NGO should provide additional support beyond applications for certification to aide in implementing PPT strategies. This can be accomplished through a comprehensive NGO-run website to connect business operators with charities, organizations, and programs available in their region for partnership in PPT strategies, as well as being available by phone and in-person visits for personalized support.

The current Costa Rica brand advertises the biodiversity and environmental sustainability approach of the country so most ecotourists associate CST certification with these same ideals. The CST award system itself is a ranking of number of leaves, which perpetuates the environmental aspect of the certification. Few tourists do the research to understand the different categories of CST certification and therefore are unaware of the social aspect. A PPT certification will alert customers to a business's participation in efforts to improve the livelihoods and communities of lower socioeconomic regions. The label will also serve as an educational tool making tourists cognizant of the plight of poor communities and their need for support. The design of the label is important to ensure it portrays this connection. Figure 4

demonstrates a viable label design that displays the message of empowerment seamlessly

integrated into an existing visual resource depicting the cooperative relationship being tourism

and the community.

Figure 4: Proposed PPT certification label designed by author using image of grasping hands
Source of grasping hands image: "Helping hands logo", n.d.

Capitalizing on Pro-Poor Tourism

A pro-poor tourism certification program will successfully provide each of the influences given

by the UNWTO as previously described: employment by tourism industry, sales to tourism

industry, direct sales to tourists, running tourism enterprises, tourism tax benefits, cultural

tourism and voluntourism, and infrastructure improvements. Figure 5 demonstrates the

relationship between tourism and poverty that can be possible with a PPT certification program.

Figure 5: Achieving equity in poor communities through the incorporation of pro-poor tourism
Source: Rogerson, 2006

The purpose of the PPT certification program is to provide a net benefit to both the individual and the community as a whole in low socioeconomic regions. The 38 strategies are meant to go above and beyond the simplistic goal of capital gains for the individual through increased employment of local residents and to instead empower resilience in individuals and support community development. Strategies such as employers providing professional training and English classes allow for career advancements. Use of locally produced goods in business operations, in decorating, and in product sales creates a niche for entrepreneurs seeking financial independence. Programs to train local students, promoting local businesses, and donating to infrastructure improvements are all strategies for community progress. The strategies are also all consistent with any type of tourism business regardless of size, which alleviates previous issues of PPT programs promoting mass tourism.

While on the surface PPT strategies appear to support poor communities at the cost of the tourism business, implementing a certification system affords businesses the opportunity to capitalize on their humanitarian efforts. Ecotourists and conscience-minded mass tourists select businesses to patronize based on their actions towards sustainable operations. Advertising a PPT certification logo on their website notifies potential customers that they participate in sustainable practices. A mass tourist not looking to specifically select a sustainable business can still be swayed by the label when they realize they are presented with the opportunity to support a business that is working to make a difference. Discerning ecotourists familiar with the PPT certification will also be able to search for participating businesses on the certification website. Businesses advertising the logo will therefore earn a larger customer base than they previously experienced and the increased profits associated with this.

Goals of the Program

In 2015 the UN implemented the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as part of the 2030 Agenda. Figure 6 identifies the 17 goals that are being addressed at the global scale to achieve world-wide sustainable development in the next decade.

Figure 6: Sustainable Development Goals from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
Source: "Tourism and the SDGs", n.d.

The vision of instituting a pro-poor tourism certification program is to effectively address all 3

sectors of sustainability (social, economic, and environmental) at once by tying it to the

Certification for Sustainable Tourism certification process. The researcher anticipates the

following goals and outcomes if the proposed PPT certification program is implemented with

CST. These goals are in line with the SDGs, as notated on each goal, demonstrating that

effective certification systems can lead to sustainable development worldwide.

Social Sustainability of the Community

When successfully implemented, PPT certification will lead to tourism businesses collaborating

with and building up the local community. The expectation is that empowerment of community

members will lead to community involvement in the decision-making process of tourism

development to ensure the welfare of local residents. Fully integrated and comprehensively

successful sustainable tourism will be achieved if a significant portion of the tourism businesses

are owned by local residents. The following predicted outcomes serve as the stepping stones to

this achievement.

- Increased capital (SDGs 1,2 & 8)

  o Employment rates of locals will grow, both with jobs in the tourism industry and

    through self-employment. These opportunities are described in detail in the

    Economic Sustainability section below.

  o Increased capital will be spent in the community by residents that are earning

    greater income as they purchase more food and goods than they were previously.

  o Tourism in the community will bring in capital from visits to restaurants and

    shops, stays in local accommodations, and services rendered.

  o Diversification of employment occurs as new opportunities for employment arise.

    Costa Rican income has primarily been agriculture based for many generations,

    but PPT encourages individuals to pursue art enterprises, jobs in the tourism

    industry, and ownership of small businesses. Locals are discovering that tourism

    provides more income for less work than farming (Matarrita-Cascante, Brennan,

    & Luloff, 2010). When successfully implemented, PPT can result in local

ownership of the tourism businesses, as in the Osa Peninsula of Costa Rica where

1/3 of tourism businesses are locally owned (Hunt et al., 2014).

- Empowerment of women (SDGs 5&10)

    o Historically in Costa Rica women did not contribute to household income (Chand

    & Walsh, 2018). PPT creates many self-employment opportunities for women

    that allows them to generate income for the household, while keeping their

    traditional role in the family, by manufacturing handmade crafts and products

    from the home.

    o Many employment opportunities are also available within the tourism industry for

    women looking for employment outside of the home, traditionally available only

    in the cleaning and cooking roles but now available up through management and

    administration due to equality in the hiring process.

    o Career advancement will be available for women due to equality in the hiring

    process. This sets the stage for the change in traditional gender roles that is

    already prevalent in developed countries, and for gender equality that is a

    necessary step for economic development (Chand & Walsh, 2018).

- Educational opportunities (SDG 4)

    o Schools will receive additional funding from tourism businesses directly and

    through the generation of tourism taxes in the area. Many schools in poor

    communities are unable to operate on a full-day schedule all year, so this funding

    aims to help deliver adequate education as well as improve their educational

materials. Voluntourism programs can help to build/maintain school facilities and provide voluntary educational services to the school.

- o Tourism businesses will offer trainings and internships to students and adults to help them step into the tourism industry. Residents that successfully complete these programs will have greater opportunities for employment and for career advancement.

- o English classes offered by employers will allow employees to better serve English-speaking customers, but also create opportunities for career advancement for employees that become proficient English speakers.

- o Computer classes offered by employers will create opportunities for career advancement for employees that become proficient in operating computer programs.

- Healthcare (SDG 3)

  - o Occupational healthcare plans will allow employees to visit private healthcare facilities instead of the government-run public healthcare facilities, and reduce costs of healthcare. Employers can also offer to cover the mandated monthly premiums of the public healthcare system.

  - o Businesses sponsoring healthcare initiatives and programs, as well as donating to healthcare organizations, will improve the overall health of the entire community.

  - o Voluntourism programs can help to build/maintain health facilities and provide voluntary health services.

- Cultural preservation (SDG 11)

o Through support of local businesses participating in PPT, and through advertisement to ecotourists, the opportunity will be available for the development of community-based tourism in poor communities. Community-based tourism (CBT) allows visitors to intimately engage with community members by dining and lodging in their homes and participating in cultural activities. CBT provides capital gains to those providing services, reinforces the need to preserve cultural practices, and educates the visitor to both the cultural practices of the community as well as the plight of poor communities and what can be done to support them (Škrbić et al., 2018). Participating in CBT can provide a sense of pride for tourists knowing they traveled as sustainably as possible and had an organic experience with the local community that is not possible through mass tourism. Heightened interest in place-based experiences has created the expectation for the ecotourist that areas visited in Costa Rica will be undeveloped and authentic (Nost 2013), and CBT affords the opportunity for tourism in the community without further development.

o Agritourism can be developed similarly to CBT, and likely in conjunction with CBT, but highlighting recreational activities and lodging at local farms. Agriculture has historically been a leading source of income for residents and preserving that livelihood preserves historical cultural practices that are being lost to mass tourism. Many coffee and chocolate plantations already offer tours of their farms and facilities, but this tourism can be furthered by including voluntourism opportunities to work on the farm as well as lodging accommodations. Agritourism should also be included for other less noteworthy

crops, such as the globally expanding oil palm plantations (Broadbent et al., 2012) and smaller family farms. Ecotourists look to support sustainable farms, so agritourism can also lead to environmental sustainability by providing a profitable reason for farms to participate in sustainable farming practices.

- Infrastructure development (SDGs 9 & 11)

  o New infrastructure will be developed, and existing infrastructure will receive maintenance, through donations from the tourism industry and the generation of tourism taxes in the area. Voluntourism programs can also help with building and maintenance of infrastructure. Increased infrastructure will help to service tourists and therefore attract them to the area. As tourism increases within the community, there will likely be increased government support for infrastructure development to provide the standards tourists demand from a community.

- Partnership with tourism businesses (SDGs 16 & 17)

  o Tourism businesses will no longer operate independent of the community they reside in. Community members will be involved in operation decisions that will affect the community, and members will be able to bring comments and concerns to business owners if they arise.

  o The tourism industry will become connected with the community by offering training programs for students and internships for adults. Community members will develop a better understanding of the structure of the tourism industry and businesses will develop a better understanding of the structure of the community.

o   A relationship will also be developed between tourism businesses and the

community through their support of community organizations, locally owned

businesses, and locally produced products. Businesses will have to be in constant

communication with community leaders and members to be aware of events and

activities to promote, they will be required to have a rapport with local businesses

to be able to recommend these businesses to customers, and they will have a

professional relationship with local craftsman and farmers to utilize their products

in daily operations.

- Development of community organizations

    o   Some communities have organizations in place to support sustainable practices

    and community development (Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2010; Hunt et al., 2014),

    but others have yet to develop these organizations or require additional support

    for them to be successful. Well-developed community organizations is a

    necessary component of community sustainability and of community support for

    conservation efforts (Coria and Calfucura, 2012). PPT strategies support the

    creation and operations of these organizations. NGO participation can be an

    additional source of support when creation of organizations is needed (Tao, 2018;

    Coria and Calfucura, 2012).

Economic Sustainability of the Community and Tourism Industry

Direct employment in the tourism industry and opportunities for self-employment generated by the industry are projected to lead to economic sustainability for community members. Increased patronage to the certified business due to its improved marketability is anticipated, leading to economic sustainability of participating businesses as well.

- Self-Employment (SDGs 1,2,5,8 & 10)
    - o Residents, especially women, who were previously unemployed will be able to earn an income through the creation of handmade products. Art, jewelry, and wooden crafts will be sold directly to tourists at street markets or to local stores for retail, and decorations, furniture, and quilts can be sold to tourism businesses.
    - o Those with experience in farming and fishing are able to build up business selling their fish, meat, fruits, and vegetables to restaurants and lodgings that serve food, as well as at farmers markets.
    - o Residents will be encouraged to start their own tourism businesses. They can receive training from certified businesses that support community education in the industry and will receive backing from them through recommendations given to customers.
    - o Increased rural tourism will require development of services for gastronomic needs. Locals can open a soda (small roadside eatery serving typical local food) for very little capital. It is acceptable for sodas to be operated out of the back of a house, or in a simple 3-sided roofed structure constructed along the road, and are often managed by multiple family members. Sodas provide a quick stop for

sustenance, but are also an attraction for tourists searching for the local cuisine experience and can bring in profitable returns.

- Employment (SDGs 1,2,5,8 & 10)

  o Employment rates will be higher because tourism businesses are seeking to fill positions with local residents. Employment rates of women will be higher as well due to equality in the hiring process.

  o Average income of employed residents will increase over time as they begin working their way up to management and administrative roles.

- Business Profits (SDGs 8 &17)

  o PPT certification can only be successful if the participating business is profiting as well. Certification will bring economic benefits by attracting the ecotourist customer base, creating greater revenues.

  o Certified businesses are rewarded with better lending opportunities from banks that recommend or require certification or a sustainable management plan (Blackman et al., 2014). Loan funds can be used to make improvements and further the changes necessary for sustainable practices. Certification gives the business a better market value for future prospective owners who will have a much easier time receiving financing. This also encourages the ultimate goal of PPT, for tourism businesses to be locally owned, as locals often have low capital inputs to investments and require lending on low credit.

Environmental Sustainability

Tourism development readily degrades the environment when not designed to be sustainable. The sensitive biodiversity of Costa Rica makes actions for environmental sustainability a priority if this biodiversity is to be preserved. If the designed PPT certification is used as a standalone certification (not in conjunction with CST) the projected environmental goals described below may not be met, reinforcing the recommendation for the program to be paired with an environmental certification program such as the CST.

- Resource Reduction (SDGs 6, 7, 12 & 13)
  - Certified businesses will successfully reduce their use of fresh water and electricity while also employing means of generating their own. Water can be generated through water catchment systems or graywater treatment, and electricity can be generated through solar, wind, hydro, or geothermal systems.
  - Waste production will be tracked and practices to reduce the creation of non-recyclable and non-compostable waste employed. Programs also need to be in place to properly recycle or compost as much material as possible.

- Conservation of land (SDG 15)
  - Businesses will encourage tourists to visit national parks and reserves to educate them on conservation practices and to provide monetary support to conservation efforts through entrance fees or voluntary contributions.
  - Businesses will be required, at the least, to have an environmental management plan for the land their business resides on. Certification encourages them to also

purchase tracts of land surrounding the business, or located elsewhere in the region if none is available, and to set the land aside as a private reserve.

- o Reforestation of land that has been cleared or disturbed is a necessary component of the environmental management plan for any land owned by a certified business.

- Increased wildlife (SDG 15)

  - o Proper management of the land the business is located on, creation of protected reserves in the surrounding areas, and implementation of environmentally responsible operating procedures all lead to increased habitat for wildlife. Biodiversity and wildlife numbers have both been shown to be higher in areas of certified hotels than in areas of non-certified hotels (Gomez, 2017). Habitats are becoming fragmented due to tourism development (Broadbent et al., 2012) so the creation of corridors between larger tracts of habitat should be the goal of businesses in those areas seeking certification.

  - o Illegal hunting and trapping are significant causes of loss of wildlife in Costa Rica (Broadbent et al., 2012). Residents see wildlife as a resource for both food and money, leading hunting expeditions or selling animals that have been illegally trapped to tourists desiring exotic creatures as pets. Residents have been historically resistant to changing their traditional ways, but employment in the tourism industry has shown to change the view of residents who are able to see the importance of protecting wildlife as a means of capital through ecotourism, leading to a reduction in illegal hunting (Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2010). The

role of a PPT certification in fostering a positive relationship between tourism

businesses and the community will further aid in the eradication of hunting in

areas promoting tourism.

- Sustainable Farming (SDG 15)

  o As agritourism develops, the opportunity to capture the ecotourist customer base

    arises through the concept of sustainable farming. Implementing sustainable

    farming practices requires an input of capital, and may not initially provide as

    large of a product yield as mass-farming practices, so has therefore been pushed

    to the backburner for many farmers. Agritourism provides additional capital for

    farmers which may provide the funds needed to implement new sustainable

    practices. More importantly, transitioning to sustainable farming attracts the

    ecotourist community to their agritourism activities and the sale of their products,

    both producing greater returns. Sustainably produced products are also sought

    after in the health food market so sustainable farms may be able to expand their

    product sales to an international forum.

  o Sustainable farming is farming practices that do not disrupt the natural processes

    of the ecosystem. This includes common practices such as not using pesticides

    and limiting runoff. In areas of high biodiversity, however, there are other

    important aspects of sustainable farming. It is necessary to leave remnant forest

    patches around the border of plantations as these serve as adequate habitat for

    wildlife and can provide corridors between larger sections of remnant forest

    (Daily et al. 2003). Multi-story agroforestry is the ideal cropping method which

intersperses other trees and shrubs along with the desired crop to replicate forest canopy structure and biodiversity (Sun et al. 2017). Quality habitat is created while additional economic returns are available if the other canopy levels are harvested for profit as well.

- Changes in local views of conservation (SDGs 11-13 & 15-17)
  - A continuous battle ensues to stop residents that disregard rules against resource (wood, plants, animals) collection in parks and reserves, and harbor resentment against their activities being forced out of these areas that used to belong to the community. Direct involvement with the tourism industry has made residents aware of the valuable commodity their forests possess and has improved their attitudes about protected areas (Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2010). Hunt et al. (2014) found that non-tourism workers consumed natural resources from the forest twice as often as tourism workers, and Campbell et al. (2007) found that participating in an ecotourism environmental project led to a 32% increase in the personal value of conservation benefits. One local explains that the community's consciousness of the environment before tourism was zero, and now, after the tourism boom, their consciousness is at a 60 (on a scale of 1 to 100) as they understand that the environment is what brings the tourists (Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2010).
  - When communities have a more positive view of environmental conservation they can see the need to proactively implement their own sustainable practices and programs. The Osa Peninsula in Costa Rica is a case in point of where the

community, located in the most biodiverse region of the country, has built up a

sustainable tourism industry made primarily of certified ecolodges and locally

owned businesses that support a successful community (Hunt et al., 2014). Many

PPT strategies are employed including community organizations of tourism

business owners, training programs for students, and sustainable farming

practices. La Fortuna is another example of a community that has built up

conservation programs like their renowned community organization the

ADIFORT that uses tourism fees for community development, their recycling

program, and their zero-carbon emissions project (Matarrita-Cascante et al.,

2010).

Conclusion

The world is facing a crux in development, needing to transition to sustainable practices before

we suffer irreversible environmental and/or social damages. Tourism development is included as

part of this dilemma. Traditional mass tourism is not sustainable as, "from the perspective of the

resident of the third world host country, the tourist comes to their land, consumes, creates waste,

damages the ecosystem, and in many cases will never have any direct contact whatsoever with

the local population" (LePree 2008). The tourism industry is in need of a complete overhaul to

retrofit all businesses for sustainable operations that protect the environment and local

communities while still providing economic returns. Earning a sustainable tourism certification

is a profitable method of engaging in sustainable practices for businesses.

Costa Rica has a well-developed "pure life" tourism brand ("What is the Country Brand," n.d.) that attracts over 1.7 million tourists per year ("About Costa Rica," n.d.). Costa Rica's Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST) program is a world-renowned certification system that has been proven effective and reliable. Opponents of sustainability certifications cite the disproportionate certification of large mass tourism businesses that provide very little socioeconomic gains to poor communities (Tao, 2018). With 41% of residents living in poor rural communities (Robalino, & Villalobos, 2015), there is a great need for social sustainability practices in the tourism industry of Costa Rica. Pro-poor tourism (PPT) is the concept of tourism businesses collaborating with poor communities through employment, education, healthcare, and community development. A PPT certification system would ensure that participating businesses are adequately supporting their local communities, and receiving the benefit of a certification label.

A detailed plan for a PPT certification program is described. 38 PPT strategies are identified, constructed from the Socioeconomic Environment section of the CST application. Certification is awarded if the business successfully implements at least 75% (29) of the strategies. The program will be administered by an NGO that will provide comprehensive support before, during, and after certification. A website will also be managed by the NGO to provide community resources for businesses and to connect potential customers with PPT certified businesses.

A comprehensive sustainable tourism plan is to partner a PPT certification system with an existing sustainability certification such as the CST program. This ensures that all 3 sectors of sustainability are achieved, as outlined in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Goals of PPT Certification

Social Sustainability	Economic Sustainability	Environmental Sustainability
Increased capital	Self-employment	Resource reduction
Empowerment of women	Employment	Conservation of land
Educational opportunities	Business profits	Increased wildlife
Healthcare		Sustainable farming
Cultural preservation		Changes in local views of conservation
Infrastructure development		
Partnership with tourism businesses		
Development of community organizations		

It is important to note that this research reports on the theoretical outcomes of PPT certification in model conditions. Not all goals will be achieved if there are extenuating circumstances such as lack of community organizations to collaborate with, reluctance of residents to become employees of the tourism industry, or failure for certification to bring the increased income necessary for the business to continue participation. If even only a few of the 8 social sustainability goals are met, while not ideal, it is still an improved socioeconomic situation over conditions before the certification. It is vital to reward sustainable efforts and celebrate any

triumphs for the community until a fully successful sustainable community can be attained (Tao, 2018).

Epilogue

In the development of this research report, I have recognized a great need for the development of an NGO to assist small businesses in the CST process. CST certification is a timely and costly process that many smaller accommodations lack the resources and funds to complete (Mic & Eagles, 2019). The planning and application process is intensive and, to truly be impactful, a program for implementation and analysis of results of conservation efforts needs to be managed by a team of employees to determine if practices are effective or need to be modified (Gomez, 2017). Small businesses are unable to employ these additional positions and would greatly benefit from an NGO that would provide these services free of charge or at a reduced rate. The NGO would also be able to raise funds to help subsidize the cost of changes necessary for implementation of sustainable operations.

Certifying small businesses for sustainable practices is an integral part of the sustainable tourism concept since the ultimate goal of PPT is for businesses to be locally owned, and ownership of large businesses is unattainable for a majority of community members. In the accommodations sector of the tourism industry, ecolodges and small hotels are more promising candidates of successful sustainable tourism due to their smaller ecological footprint and tendency to cater to tourists that are more conscientious of their impact on the community and environment, and should therefore be supported in the certification process. Many small businesses already

participate in sustainable practices but are fiscally unable to pursue the certification process. The support of an NGO would allow these businesses to become certified and receive the economic benefits associated with the award. Another benefit that could be provided by the NGO would be an online portal to serve as a small-business community in which members can communicate and collaborate with each other, and where customers can find certified small businesses to patronize.

In closing, I would like to address my personal interest in the topic of sustainable tourism and sustainable development. Having the fortunate opportunity to have authentic community-based and ecotourism experiences in Costa Rica on multiple occasions, I have developed a strong emotional investment in the country and its tourism industry. I have witnessed firsthand the successes of ecotourism in the Southern Zone towards a sustainable tourism industry, as well as the environmental and social disturbance of mass tourism in Northern Guanacaste. I have great trepidation about future development of the tourism industry, especially in biologically sensitive areas such as the Osa Peninsula which is recognized as one of the most biodiverse regions in the world. Tourism in the Osa Peninsula has been successfully developed thus far as an ecotourism destination and is an excellent example of sustainable tourism with many pro-poor tourism practices in place, including local resident ownership of many of the tourism businesses. Discussion in recent years of constructing an international airport in the region to make it more readily accessible to tourists is one such cause for my apprehension. It is my hope that implementation of reliable and effective certification systems and standards for sustainable development will protect Costa Rica, and other biologically sensitive countries, for many future generations to come.

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