Ethics in Sustainable Tourism Development

*Scholarship Essay for the Nicholas D. and Anna Ricco Ethics Award*

Kaitlyn Marie O’Neill
University of North Texas
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An increasing body of evidence exists concerning the fact that tourism development is often not sustainable, primarily in terms of conserving the environment, protecting cultures, and maintaining a viable local economy (Cater, 1993). With tourism regularly being cited as one of the world’s largest industries, tourism development will only continue to grow and expand. This growth has the potential to preserve the environment, stimulate the economy, and increase the social conditions in tourism destinations if conducted mindfully. However, unsustainable development has been proven, time and time again, to have the potential to virtually abolish culture and destroy the natural environment.

In Bocas del Toro, Panama, for instance, locals’ homes are literally being bulldozed in front of their entire families by developers in order to make room for mega resorts to support the massive influx of tourists (Prado, 2011). A multitude of organizations exist (Green Cross International, United Nations, etc.) in order to support human rights and protect the environment, all of which believe that a focus on ethical behavior and a re-evaluation of priorities are the only ways that lofty goals of world peace and environmental preservation can be accomplished.

Particularly because there is no universally accepted code of ethics that all humans abide by, it is imperative that those within the tourism industry behave in a responsible manner and have a high degree of respect for both society and nature. Keeping the goals of sustainable tourism (the delicate balance between economic development, nature conservation, and the protection of local cultures) in mind is a crucial prerequisite for maintaining the long-term viability of a destination.

The pursuit of capital is so deeply engrained in the citizens of most developed countries that often, they fail to recognize clear violations of human or environmental rights that occur throughout the process of this quest. While tourism developers believe they have a right to
develop countries, the rights of the natural environment, as well as those of local societies must also be considered. The epitome of ethical behavior in sustainable tourism development would require a paradigm shift away from focusing exclusively on the economy, and towards ensuring that the environment and local cultures are treated with both compassion and the utmost respect at all times.

I have chosen the Master of Science in International Sustainable Tourism at the University of North Texas because it embodies my concern for sustainability with my love for different cultures. In my future career, I envision myself as a liaison between the developer and indigenous cultures; someone who encourages developers to behave in ethical and sustainable ways, and ensures that the voices of the indigenous are being heard.

I am incredibly passionate about tourism and international issues, and feel that sustainable tourism can be a catalyst for positive change worldwide. I am excited at the prospect of having the opportunity to encourage others to begin to understand the wealth of experiences, opportunities, and capacity for global change that this industry has to offer, and at beginning a career in which I can truly work to make the world a better place in which to live.

I look forward to the potential opportunity to receive this scholarship, and I thank you for your consideration. I can be reached at (940) 597-9321 or kaitlynmarie0317@hotmail.com.

Sincerely,

Kaitlyn Marie O’Neill
References
