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People–Nature Interactions

Adventure, Nature and Commodification

HEATHER PRINCE AND CHRIS LOYNES

Many (though not all) adventures have nature-based orientations, but, when established as commodities defined as marketable products, they are premised on destinations that normally comprise a wealth of natural environments. Adventure 'tourism' as 'guided commercial tours where the principal attraction is an outdoor activity that relies on features of the natural terrain, generally requir[ing] specialised sporting or similar equipment, and is exciting for the tour clients' (Buckley 2006, 1) is part of the emerging genre of provision. It can be positioned alongside 'nature tourism' where the emphasis is on travelling to enjoy and understand undeveloped natural areas and/or 'wildlife tourism', or 'ecotourism', which includes overtly educative and sustainability components. It is the interplay of adventure, nature and their emergence and manifestations through the concept of tourism that is the subject of this chapter.

Although definitions for 'rational' tourism (tourism with a purpose) are multifarious (see for example Swarbrooke *et al* 2011), one key defining factor is that they are activities that are entered into voluntarily. Adventure tourism has emerged from the outdoor recreation industry, which has been established for longer, with its roots in outdoor activities, journeying and expeditions. It is generally contextualised in environments that are rich in landscapes and are perceived to be relatively natural and unmodified, at least in historical times. The emphasis is on 'adventure', although this creates an interesting paradox when aligned with 'tourism' in that if 'adventure' relates to 'uncertainty of outcome' (Hopkins and Putnam 1993; Priest 1999), participants who are purchasing support often do so to reduce their perceived risk. Ecotourism is seen as a different subset, even though for many participants it may include an adventure, as they perceive it. It involves travel to a relatively pristine area with challenges to clients of the unknown. It is differentiated in the literature from adventure tourism in that the objective is to be immersed in that relatively undisturbed environment, to study and enjoy the landscape, flora and/or fauna as well as any cultural manifestations, past or present (Fennell 2003; 2015).

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Beyond the discovery of new territories, exploration focused on the polar regions (Scott and Shackleton, for example) and thence from conquering the highest mountains to aeronautical and space exploration. Interest in mountaineering, however, stems from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the Romantic movement in Europe, when mountains were thought to have spiritual and mystical qualities and when contact with nature was important. Following on from this, the upper classes strived to test themselves in mountain sports in the Alps (for example, Edward Whymper). The focus throughout all of these explorations was on first ascents/descents and journeys with specific goals. For naturalists such as Charles Darwin, the adventure was intel-

lectual in the search for new floral and faunal species and thus had an overtly 'nature' context. While Darwin's adventures could be framed as scientific exploration, John Ruskin is credited with a more philanthropic contribution to environmentalism, realising that unmodified nature could be captured through poetry and art, which was substantially enhanced by the extensive and privileged travels he enjoyed. He epitomises the emergence of a more aesthetic intent, captured through spending time in nature with emergent psychological and spiritual understandings – perhaps more of a nineteenth-century 'nature' tourist.

The post-Darwin, post-Ruskin self in modernity in the Western world saw the rise of the working class, the distribution of wealth and the availability of leisure time to 'escape' from the workplace coupled with the individual constructing the moral self. Interestingly, in Victorian times, for key figures such as Millican Dalton ('Professor of Adventure') and Ernest Thompson Seton (founder of the Woodcraft Folk), living simply and in harmony with nature was important as well.

Expeditions in the early twentieth century were sponsored or scientific and private, with members invited to join on the basis of skill or experience, or towards optimising the group performance as a whole. This continues today although some organisations (for example The British Exploring Society) provide expedition opportunities which are available to a range of young people through application and selection, and they would see their mission as exploration with components of learning and scientific work, not as adventure or ecotourism. Critics, however, would still question the elitist nature of the clientele, privileging public-school and middle- and upper-class pupils. In terms of the adult population, with more urbanised lifestyles lacking outdoor components, there has been a shift to more commodification propelled by social mobility, aspiration and choice for 'cash rich, time poor' people.

Loynes' (1998) seminal paper on the development of outdoor adventure as 'recreational capitalism' was inspired by 'The McDonaldisation of Society' (Ritzer 1993) in which he proposes that much of life's experience is provided in terms of a safe, dependable and standard product akin to a McDonald's hamburger. Adventure was at that time developing marketplace branding and marketplace values, and adopting terms such as 'customers' and 'services'. There was deep concern about the move away from the values of the social movement with its relationship towards place and community. Through McDonaldisation the activity is no longer part of a cultural story, nor does it explore a particular landscape but is a 'replicable structure' (Loynes 2013, 141) with the same elements everywhere. It is one expression of globalisation with its spread of ideas, culture and institutions, as well as business around the world. Ecotourism, with its foundations in natural environments, might be seen as an amelioration of such criticism in so far as it does consider place and culture, and the identity of destinations mitigates against replication.

In retrospect, this was a turning point for the expansion of these tourism paradigms servicing the consumer with a product. However, many adventure and ecotourism companies would advocate that they do provide tailored experiences and respect for culture and landscape. Although an experience might be marketed as a safari, whale watching, rafting trip or bungee jump (McDonaldisation) and thus be expected to contain defined key elements, it will also offer clientele the opportunity to visit new and different environments.

In the last twenty years, there has also been an increase in commercial providers of adventure holidays for young people (eg PGL) and adults (eg Explore Worldwide; KE Adventure Travel). The direction of adventure for the development of self-constructs (self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-reliance etc.) is still present in formal education, for example through initiatives such as

Adventure Learning Schools (Hopkins 2012), and the Outward Bound Trust continues to follow Kurt Hahn's principles for encouraging independence, increasing self-awareness and enabling young people to be able to cope for themselves, although its branding has moved away from 'adventure' to 'outdoor learning in the wild' (The Outward Bound Trust 2014). However, adventure as a commodity would seem to emphasise adrenaline, excitement and enjoyment and any maturation or development of self is subsidiary or hidden.

Similarly, nature or eco-based commercial providers (eg Naturetrek) have expanded in recent times but the concomitant developments for young people have been through non-formal education such as Forest Schools, community initiatives or bushcraft. Barnes and Sharp (2004) suggest that understanding and experiencing nature, changing behaviour and attitudes are key attributes of learning for sustainability. However, these activities are usually in local settings and, unlike 'exotic' locations of some ecotourism destinations, limit carbon emissions rather than increase them.

Adventure and ecotourism have evolved to service the cohort of people who can pay for experiences in remote areas and have that desire and basic fitness, but not necessarily the time, skills, equipment or experience to organise such activities themselves. There may also be those who prefer to devolve the responsibility to others for a range of reasons. Some may be young professionals on a 'tick' list of destinations or journeys; others may be in later life and seeking guided support on their trips. Adventure and ecotourists have the experience defined for them, other than the spontaneous or unexpected event.

MOTIVATIONS OF ADVENTURE AND ECOTOURISTS

Bourdieu (1984) described the notion of 'habitus' at the subconscious level as socialised norms or tendencies that guide behaviour and thinking. These tourists might seek to escape from daily routine but their 'habitus' travels with them and thus there are wider social connotations of the outcomes that these experiences may provide. Furthermore, there is the notion of identity. Autonomy of the individual and self-expression, in the form of what we do in our leisure time, constitutes our identity as an individual and as part of a group (Beedie 2003).

People search for new emotions and sensations, to be in touch with nature and seek freedom, spontaneity and pleasure, which they see as important for quality of life. Often they seek simple but comfortable living in a peaceful, natural environment and search for their inner selves (Mortlock 2009) and relief from stress and tension. Thus, there is a general desire to increase well-being but it may be that the individual cannot define the emotions and sensations they seek and that these might be unconscious objectives of participating in such experiences (Carnicelli-Filho *et al* 2010). There might be the further agendas of citizenship: what can I give and what can I take from society?

Much research has assessed inherent risk as part of the motivation of clients (Buckley 2012; Cater 2006; Carnicelli-Filho *et al* 2010; Swarbrooke *et al* 2011). Mortlock (1984) provides a well-known model describing four stages of adventure: Play, Adventure, Frontier (or Peak) Adventure and Misadventure. Although grounded in adventure education, Mortlock is interested in the human potential and energy that can be realised when engaging in true adventure. It would be assumed that most adventure tourists are seeking the frontier adventure experience, where clients are experiencing adventures very close to their limits, although their guides and leaders might be working at the adventure level, well within their limits and capabilities, providing excitement

and enjoyment. This is the difference between real and perceived risk and this differential is narrower in ecotourism.

The wider risk management (or 'risk benefit' as many now prefer to term it; Morton 2011) responsibility lies with the company – one of the main reasons for an individual to elect to have their adventure and nature experiences provided for them. However, it should be stressed that risk is only one part of the challenge provided by adventure tourism; along with ecotourism, the expectation is of rewards, novelty stimulus and enthusiasm, exploration and discovery, as well as those emotional and social outcomes.

ADVENTURE AND NATURE AS A BUSINESS

The commodification and commercialisation of outdoor adventure and nature with reference to the packaging of experiences is of concern to some. Most outdoor and environmental educators would rather stand away from this type of provision, preferring to tailor experiences to the needs, interests, motivations and curricula of young people. However, in this neoliberalist era, education has to be funded and many outdoor centres provide commercial activities (corporate training, recreation) to support the education of young people, sometimes at the same location – such as is provided at Derwent Hill in the Lake District (Derwent Hill 2014). But the business and enterprise of adventure and ecotourism keeps on growing and expanding.

Provision for unskilled or less skilled clients – the so-called 'soft' adventurers – has broadened market demand by reducing remoteness, risk and skill requirements. At the other end of the spectrum, the narrow apex is smaller in volume with a prescribed higher level of prior skills, a greater level of risk and higher costs (Buckley 2004). In a mountaineering context, the spectrum could be illustrated from Kilimanjaro to Everest. Varley (2006) refers to this as 'The Adventure Commodification Continuum', with ecotourist products and highly saleable, not very adventurous tourist experiences such as balloon rides and bungee jumps at one end (the shallow end), through guided tours, expeditions as at the end of the spectrum above but moving towards deep and pure, 'ideal and original' adventure (solo and independent expeditions). The model is illustrative of the paradoxical relationship between the marketplace and its demands and the notion of pure adventure, but is quite simplistic as it does not acknowledge personality and socialisation, or situational factors.

The expansion of these types of rational tourism has resulted in parallel growth in related businesses such as outfitters, local organisers and guides, with a cascading impact on indigenous communities; on one hand bringing positive effects through employment (although whether or not a fair wage is paid may be questionable) but also impacting negatively due to a lack of understanding by some tourists of customs, heritage and lifestyle. Many communities in these destinations are socially vulnerable and a number of companies are now working towards responsible and ethical tourist conduct. This reflects concerns about the marketing and management of adventure and eco-experiences as part of wider considerations; 'to address real concerns of inequality, marginalisation, hegemony and injustice, we must learn a new civichood, one that is based upon the ideals of participation, deliberation, community and responsibility' (Roberts 2011, 101). Economic benefit is also brought to the countries of origin through employment in tour companies and equipment suppliers. Beyond these social and economic impacts, the pursuance of adventure and eco-activities necessarily use natural resources, which may have a number of less obvious ramifications.

A natural environment is an important milieu for these types of tourism and clients seek encounters with nature and wildlife, a temporary 'back to basics' style of living and new and different landscapes. One argument is that '...adventure tourism has had a positive impact on environmental conservation, because it has given the environment a monetary value and destinations a financial incentive for conservation' (Swarbrooke *et al* 2011, 194). This is an interesting but limited defence against the well quoted and implemented criteria for assessing the value of nature conservation in Britain by Derek Ratcliffe, which do not mention monetary value directly (Ratcliffe 1977). The notion of ecosystem 'capital' or ecosystem 'services' perhaps has more meaning when considered with reference to tourism, in that it goes beyond economic benefits (the production of goods such as seafood or timber) to life-support processes (such as pollination, thought to be worth £200m a year in the UK) and life-fulfilling conditions (such as serenity and beauty). These non-material benefits, referred to as 'cultural' services, provide a best fit for eco- and adventure tourism. Unfortunately, 'relative to other forms of capital, ecosystems are poorly understood, scarcely monitored, and (in many cases) undergoing rapid degradation and depletion' (Daily *et al* 2000). However, in the UK, the 2011 National Ecosystem Assessment concluded that nature and ecosystems are important to our well-being and economic prosperity. They are consistently undervalued in conventional economic analyses and decision-making, although the more recent 'Follow on' Ecosystem Assessment (UKNEAS 2014) provides new information and tools to help decision-makers across all sectors to understand the wider value of our ecosystems and the services they offer.

The positive impact argument above has also been countered by negative impact through the development of facilities at some destinations and the impact of the activities themselves: erosion, aid climbing affecting rock faces and non-biodegradable waste disposal, in addition to the disturbance of fragile ecosystems. The 'honey pot' argument is proposed in defence of these negativities in so far as impact is usually spread out rather than focused in one area, thus lessening the impact. Conversely, hedonistic tourism should perhaps be more concentrated and its influence geographically contained.

The impacts of this rapidly expanding and developing industry are hard to measure, quantify and monitor. Tshipala and Coetzee (2013) provide sustainable adventure tourism indicators for social, economic and environmental spheres, which they hope will aid policymakers and tourism managers in future planning and development of the industry in South Africa. The list of indicators reflects sustainable issues relating to local people, jobs, commercialisation, environmental use and benefits. Many of the environmental indicators are related to sustainable development at a global level, such as controlling greenhouse gas emissions, measuring and reducing energy use and supporting biodiversity and conservation.

The economic impacts of adventure or ecotourism are not easy to quantify. Scottish Natural Heritage commissioned a report (Bryden *et al* 2010) examining the economic impacts of nature-based tourism in Scotland. Despite the difficulties involved in assessing the total contribution of such activities by aggregation of individual features and activities, they estimated that total annual visitor spending attributable to nature-based tourism was £1.4 billion, with 39,000 associated full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs. They also looked at adventure tourism, specifically examining activities with a close affinity to natural heritage such as walking/mountaineering, snow sports, cycling, water sports and other adventure activities, but encountered difficulty in ascribing a specific motivation for any one trip – not a surprising outcome for many adventure tourist experiences; many walkers, for example, also went birdwatching.

Although disaggregation of the influence of adventure and ecotourism from the wider tourism economy has been difficult, substantial growth in this sector has been predicted from around 2007. Places have certainly seen a change in their branding and marketing, such as the Lake District, Cumbria, as the 'Adventure Capital of the UK'; Lochaber as the Outdoor Capital of the UK, offering 'an extensive range of landscapes and seascapes which feature a spectacular range of wildlife' (Outdoor Capital of the UK: Lochaber 2014); and Queenstown, New Zealand, as the 'Adventure Capital of the World' where 'we have everything that the adventure seeker could ever want' (Queenstown Adventure 2014).

CONCLUSION

The commodification of adventure and nature is a relatively young concept, developed over the past two decades, which is still growing and expanding. It has its roots in exploration and outdoor recreation with a focus on providing experiences that are exciting and novel and stimulate understanding, emotions and sensations about – and in – relatively natural environments. These tourism typologies are differentiated from educational experiences and expeditions that have a longer history by their emphasis on commercialisation, with brands, products and services to suit customers and consumers. For ecotourists, environments and landscapes are the main marketing tools used on visitors, steered by the impact of wildlife and nature; for adventure tourists these are important co-constituents of the experience. For both sets of clients one of their motivations is to live in close proximity to nature, in the hope of an enhanced sense of well-being in this temporary experience, as a relief from stressful and urbanised living. However, it is only recently that the impacts of the industry have been recognised and action taken to develop policy and practice towards sustainable tourism, and to engender greater responsibility and ethics amongst adventure and ecotourists to mitigate social, economic and environmental degradation.

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