Sustainable development in ecotourism

Tour operators managing the economic, social and environmental concerns of sustainable development in Costa Rica

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Summary

Sustainable development is concerned with acknowledging economic, social and environmental development aspects, catering for the current needs of society without damaging the well-being of future generations. Ecotourism is a niche market that emerged because of increased market demands for sustainable tourism practices. It serves to provide tourism products and services while accommodating for the economic, social and environmental aspects of society. However, earlier research suggests that it is difficult to handle the three dimensions of sustainable development, indicating that trade-offs may occur. Furthermore, as tour operators are able to affect local development prospects, it is of interest to examine how they handle sustainable development, and more specifically, contribute to trade-offs between the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development.

This thesis was aimed at answering the following research question; “How do ecotourism tour operators contribute to trade-offs between the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development?”, with the objective of examining how ecotourism tour operators handle the dimensions of sustainable development, and what trade-offs that may occur between economic, social and environmental concerns.

This qualitative research was carried out in the context of ecotourism tour operators in Costa Rica through semi-structured interviews. Nine respondents participated in this research, representing seven local ecotourism tour operators. The data collected on the trade-offs of ecotourism and sustainable development has in turn been analysed with reference to a pre-established theoretical framework.

This study has revealed that ecotourism tour operators are actively engaging in initiatives supporting the idea of sustainable development. The tour operators handle the economic, social and environmental concerns through different initiatives. One conclusion that can be derived from this research is that all pillars of sustainable development are important to acknowledge. However, this is difficult as the three dimensions are somewhat contradicting. Therefore, depending on how ecotourism tour operators prioritise different initiatives, trade-offs are inevitable as both inter- and intragenerational needs are difficult to align.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Sustainable development, Trade-offs, Triple bottom line
Abbreviations

CST  Certification for Sustainable Tourism
GDRC Global Development Research Centre
GRI  Global Reporting Initiative
GUD  Global Urban Development
ICT  Costa Rican Tourism Board
INEC National Institute of Statistics and Census of Costa Rica
MFA  Ministry for Foreign Affairs
SINAC National System of Conservation Areas
TIES International Ecotourism Society
UI   Swedish Institute of International Affairs
UN   United Nations
UNEP United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture
UNWTO World Tourism Organization
WBI  World Bank Institute
WCED World Commission on Environment and Development
WTO  World Trade Organization
Concept definitions

**Developing country** – “A developing country is one in which the majority lives on far less money—with far fewer basic public services—than the population in highly industrialized countries” (World Bank Institute, WBI, 2012). According to WBI (2012), developing countries have to face issues of extreme poverty and hunger, insufficient education and health systems and social inequalities etc.

**Ecotourism** – Sustainable tourism related activities that mainly occur in close proximity to nature. In line with the concept of sustainable tourism, ecotourism is concerned with promoting economic and social development, without compromising the state of natural ecosystems and biodiversity.

**Sustainable development** – “Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability for future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, WCED, 1987, ch. 2, para. 1).

**Ticos** – The local inhabitants of Costa Rica.

**Tour operators** – Organisations whose main purpose is to provide tours.

**Trade-off** – Compromising one aspect in favour for another.

**Triple bottom line** – The multi-level approach of sustainable development, combining the focus on, and effect of, economic, social and environmental concerns.
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1. Introduction

The purpose of this introductory chapter is to make the reader familiar with the phenomenon of ecotourism. This chapter consists of a discussion concerning the global development of the tourism debate and how it is related to sustainable economic, social and environmental development. Consequently, the discussion introduces the framework of ecotourism, leading towards the problem definition and research objective of the thesis.

1.1 Background

Tourism is one of the world’s largest and most rapidly expanding industries (World Tourism Organization, UNWTO, 2013a); an industry that enabled over one billion tourists to travel the globe in 2012 (UNWTO, 2012a). Due to sought-after climate and environmental differences (cf. Williams, 2009, p. 111), the major flow of tourists’ goes from the northern hemisphere to the south (Holden, 2008, p. 22-23). Moreover, global tourism is predominantly driven by tourist flows from developed to less developed countries (Telfer & Sharpley, 2008, p. 21-22). When vast amount of tourists travel to developing locations, they have a potential effect on local communities, and environmental protection and regeneration (Preston-Whyte et al., 2006, p. 137). Additionally, tourism is a primary source of economic development for developing countries (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005, s. 120; Telfer & Sharpley, 2008, p. 2). One developing country that is highly dependent on tourism is Costa Rica. In 2011, around 2.2 million tourists visited Costa Rica (Costa Rican Tourism Board, ICT, 2012), equivalent to 51 per cent of the country’s population at the time (National Institute of Statistics and Census of Costa Rica, INEC, 2013). As a consequence, tourism constitutes the primary source of income for Costa Rica (Koens et al., 2009, p. 1232; ICT, 2013a).

Being a developing country, a majority of the incoming tourists travel from developed nations to Costa Rica. About 59 per cent of the country’s visitors in 2011 travelled to Costa Rica from the Northern American and European continents (ICT, 2012), clearly indicating that the country’s income is highly dependent on developed nations. In general, these international travel patterns have been enabled by the increased global mobility (e.g. Banister, 2011, p. 1538). Unfortunately, the increased tourist flows have also had significant environmental impact. In 2005, 5 per cent of the total CO₂ emissions of the world were directly assigned to tourism; including transportation, accommodation and other tourism related activities (UNWTO et al., 2008, p. 132). In addition, if tourism is poorly managed, the increased tourism movements may lead to over-exploitation of natural resources, damaging and destructing the ecosystems of developing tourism destinations (Budeanu, 2005, p. 92; Hall, 2005, p. 264; Meletis & Campbell, 2009, p. 757).
The population of the industrialised world are the main contributors to this situation (e.g. Banister, 2011, p. 1544), born in mind the particular patterns of international travel flows (Holden, 2008, p. 22-23; Telfer & Sharpley, 2008, p. 21-22). Although emissions and climate change are global problems where the effects are difficult to predict, developing countries highly dependent on the state of their ecosystems may suffer significantly from the subsequent natural degradation (cf. Gamage & Boyle, 2008, p. 50; Holden, 2008, p. 215; Pogge, 2005, p. 6). In other words, increased tourism may serve to undermine the tourism industry itself, challenging the primary source of income for many developing countries (Hall, 2006, p. 222). This environmental cause-effect dilemma of the tourism industry has catalysed a global debate on sustainable development in relation to tourism (e.g. Banister, 2011, p. 1544).

As Barkemeyer et al. (2011, p. 2) points out, the current discussion on sustainable development is highly related to the definition developed by the Brundtland Commission in 1987. According to that definition, “sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability for future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987, ch. 2, para. 1). In order for companies and business activities to contribute to sustainable development, the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development therefore must be taken into consideration (Williams, 2009, p. 110). By minimising environmental and social harm, without preventing adequate returns, this triple bottom line approach may prove to enable sustainable development (Barkemeyer et al., 2011, p. 2-4; Elkington, 1994, p. 90; Nguyen & Slater, 2010, p. 5-6). Consequently, there is a need for tourism activities to be properly designed and controlled to enable the industry’s contribution to the three dimensions of sustainable development (United Nations, UN, 2012, p. 25).

Ecotourism is a niche tourism market that has emerged to contribute to sustainable development (Cole, 2006, p. 629; Donohoe & Needham, 2006, p. 203-204), one of the fastest growing niches of the tourism sector (UNWTO, 2012b, p. 1). The concept of ecotourism is interrelated with sustainable tourism and should be consistent with the principles of sustainable tourism and development (UNWTO, 2012b, p. 3). Although ecotourism primarily focuses on nature experiences, the concept has been promoted as a way for developing countries to combine economic growth with social and environmental concerns (Beaumont, 2011, p. 135; Duffy, 2006, p. 1; The International Ecotourism Society, TIES, 2013; UN, 2011, p. 2). In order to enable sustainable development in developing countries, the UN (2012, p. 25) encourage developing nations with high ecotourism potential to promote the creation of small and medium-sized enterprises working with sustainable tourism.

However, there is limited academically support of sustainable tourism in some geographical areas of the world. In 2009, Lu and Nepal made a literature review of all articles published in the Journal of Sustainable Tourism, where Latin and Central America represented only 6 per cent of the study locations of sustainable tourism during 2003-2007 while Europe was highly overrepresented, making up 37 per cent of all of the articles published (Lu and Nepal, 2009, p. 9). This clearly indicates that there is a geographical gap within the research of sustainable tourism, implying that more effort should be put upon conducting research in areas that earlier have been neglected by scholars in the academic field of sustainable tourism.
Moving on from the geographical gap within sustainable tourism research, tour operators are generally recognised as having a central role in developing tourism industry (Budeanu, 2005, p. 90, 94). Telfer and Sharpley (2008, p. 168-169) discuss that tour operators, managing the supply side of tourism, have an opportunity to raise consumers’ sustainability awareness, and may contribute to local destination development by influencing the local environment and engaging with local community stakeholders. Whereas transnational tour operators have the power to influence the development of the entire tourism industry (Budeanu, 2005, p. 94), local tour operators rather have the possibility to contribute to local sustainable development (cf. Seales & Stien, 2011, p. 26). Local operators may promote local tourism sustainability, encouraging their clientele to “respect the sociocultural, economic and environmental needs of destination areas” (Mbaiwa, 2005, p. 222). However, these tour enterprises need to be supported by appropriate national guidelines and regulations to facilitate their work towards creating a more sustainable tourism industry (UN, 2012, p. 25).

Costa Rica is highly regarded when it comes to bridging the gap between sustainable development and tourism (Lew et al., 2008, p. 324; Telfer & Sharpley, 2008, p. 50), and the main tourism attractions in Costa Rica are ecotourism related (Lew et al., 2008, p. 324). As such, the country is one of the predecessors of ecotourism (Barahona, interviewed in Long, 2011, p. 24; Honey, 2003, p. 39). Compared to many other developing countries, Costa Rica stands out by facilitating tourism's sustainable use of its natural resources through socio-economic and political structures including political stability characterised by democracy and social welfare programs in combination with the country’s positive attitude towards foreigners in general (Honey, 2003, p. 40). However, Costa Rica is not unique in embracing the benefits of ecotourism. One example is Laos, a developing country that has a vision to use tourism to promote natural and cultural conservation, and socio-economic development (Lao National Tourism Administration, 2013). Similarly, the Tanzania Tourist Board (2013) has embraced sustainable tourism to contribute to the development prospects of Tanzania.

At the same time as Costa Rica should not be considered as the sole promoter of ecotourism, the country’s sustainability concerns and efforts should not be romanticised. It has been a conscious and active choice on Costa Rica’s behalf to become more sustainable on a national level to differentiate itself from its neighbouring countries (Jiménez, interviewed in Long, 2011, p. 23). Moreover, as Hoffman (2005) argues, companies may strategically choose to engage in environmentally sustainable business initiatives, distinguishing themselves from their competitors. Tour operators in Costa Rica are highly encouraged by the government to contribute to sustainable development by default to differentiate the country from other Central and Latin American destinations (e.g. Certification for Sustainable Tourism, CST, 2013a). Because of the notion that ecotourism may be a commercially viable business strategy, the rise of ecotourism should be approached with caution (e.g. Honey, 2003, p. 43-44, 46), questioning the true social, environmental and economic contribution of businesses engaging in sustainable development and ecotourism.

Contributing to this precaution, it is possible that local ecotourism operators have to face trade-offs when it comes to maximising the triple bottom line of sustainable development. It may be problematic for local operators to equally cater for the three pillars of sustainable development as the three pillars of economic, social and environmental concern in some ways contradicts each other (Gray & Milne, 2004, p.
One example of potential a trade-off situation is provided in the context of greenhouse gas emissions, where Hoffman (2005, p. 23, 39) argue that companies need to evaluate if it is economically viable to decrease their environmental impact. This example implies that environmentally sustainable efforts may result in significant cost increases (cf. Moeller et al., 2011, p. 155-156; Carlsen et al., 2001, p. 293). Additionally, the notion of sustainable development is contradictory in its own right. Whereas ‘sustainable’ is an advocate for minimised resource depletion, ‘development’ instead requires optimal resource utilisation (Barkemeyer et al., 2011, p. 4; Telfer & Sharpley, 2008, p. 37).

Despite the conflicting nature of sustainable development, there is a need for research focusing on the potential trade-offs of sustainable development in relation to tourism, especially since the sustainable development of developing countries may be highly affected by tourism (Wall & Mathieson, 2006, p. 217). Few studies have shown successful examples of the integration of sustainable development and tourism within a developing context (Telfer & Sharpley, 2008, p. 31), making it difficult for the tourism industry in general to cater for the dimensions of sustainable development. However, ecotourism is in close proximity to sustainable development (Cole, 2006, p. 629; Donohoe & Needham, 2006, p. 203-204), indicating that ecotourism should be better at contributing to sustainable development compared to its conventional tourism counterpart. Given tour operators’ abilities to affect local development (Budeanu, 2005, p. 90, 94; Mbaiwa, 2005, p. 222; Seales & Stien, 2011, p. 26; Telfer & Sharpley, 2008, p. 168-169), it is in our opinion important to address how tour operators within the ecotourism industry handle local sustainable development. In addition, we argue that it is interesting to explore the potential trade-offs tour operators face when managing the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

1.2 Research question

With regards to the above problematisation, the thesis will seek to answer the following question:

“How do ecotourism tour operators handle the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in a developing country context?”

1.3 Research objective

The objective of this study is to examine how ecotourism tour operators handle the dimensions of sustainable development in a developing country situation. By doing this, the thesis is aimed at revealing how tour operators’ management of economic, social and environmental concerns may result in trade-offs between the three dimensions.

1.4 Limitations

This study will investigate the case of ecotourism tour operators in Costa Rica, a developing Central American nation. Although the findings may be relevant to other actors both on a national and international basis, the study and its results will by no means represent all companies and organisations that are engaging in ecotourism and sustainable development, neither in Costa Rica nor in other developing countries.
1.5 Research disposition

Chapter 1: Introduction – The purpose of this introductory chapter has been to make the reader familiar with the phenomenon of ecotourism. The chapter has discussed the global development of the tourism debate and how it is related to sustainable economic, social and environmental development, introducing the framework of ecotourism, and the problem and research objective of the thesis.

Chapter 2: Academic starting point – The aim of this theoretical methodology is to introduce how we as authors approach the phenomena we are studying. By explaining our preconceptions, research philosophy, approach and perspectives, our intention is to facilitate a critical examination of the material that is produced. The academic starting point concludes with a reflection on the theoretical frame of reference’s acquisition.

Chapter 3: Theoretical frame of reference – In this chapter, the theoretical frame of reference will be established. First, ecotourism and its relationship to sustainability will be examined. Then, sustainable development will be introduced and analysed in terms of economic, social and environmental aspects. Finally, ecotourism and sustainable development will be interconnected ending with a discussion on trade-offs of the dimensions of sustainable development in the context of ecotourism.

Chapter 4: Ecotourism in Costa Rica – This chapter will introduce the Costa Rican context in which the data collection takes place, before presenting the research strategy in chapter 5. The country’s natural assets, socio-economic and political structures, its ecotourism industry, and its certification for sustainable tourism will be introduced.

Chapter 5: Research strategy – This chapter aims to explain the research strategy of this thesis. The data collection will be explained followed by interview sample criteria. The interview respondents will be presented and a non-responsive analysis will be conducted. Furthermore, the interview guides and themes will be introduced. Finally, interview limitations and data processing will be briefly discussed in this chapter. Ethical considerations are included continuously when they arise.

Chapter 6: Empirical findings and analysis – The purpose of this chapter is to present the empirical findings of this study in the main areas of ecotourism and sustainable development. Common denominators and potential contradictions between theory and the information that has been revealed during the interviews will be exemplified. Continuously, the data will be analysed to form the basis for the conclusions.

Chapter 7: Concluding remarks – In this chapter, the concluding remarks of this thesis will be revealed, pinpointing ecotourism tour operators’ ways of handling economic, social and environmental concerns and the trade-offs their activities contribute to. Furthermore, the thesis’ theoretical and practical significance and contributions will be discussed, ending with a section of future research directions.

Chapter 8: Truth criteria – Research has to be rigorously carried out in order to provide any applicability. Although we will keep the evaluative concepts presented in mind throughout the process when designing our method, this chapter is primarily focused on providing a post hoc assessment of the research to evaluate the results that will be presented.
2. Academic starting point

The aim of this theoretical methodology is to introduce how we as authors approach the phenomena we are studying. By explaining our preconceptions, research philosophy, approach and perspectives, our intention is to facilitate a critical examination of the material that is produced. The academic starting point concludes with a reflection on the theoretical frame of reference’s acquisition.

Figure 2 Academic starting point

2.1 Preconceptions

In order for the reader to critically reflect upon the contributions of this thesis, it is important to highlight our preconceptions. Preconceptions are affected by the researcher’s previous experiences, possibly contributing to the study’s level of subjectivity (Johansson Lindfors, 1993, p. 25, 152). In other words, there is a risk that our pre-understanding of reality may influence the choices we make when we conduct our research. However, we are aware of this predicament and will continuously reflect upon the effect of our preconceptions when conducting our study.

Apart from our mutual studies in retail and supply chain management at Umeå School of Business and Economics, we have both studied sustainability, business ethics and value-based management, one on an undergraduate level at Luleå University of Technology and the other on a postgraduate level at Copenhagen Business School. The topic of ecotourism has been derived from our mutual interest in business ethics and sustainable development. Nevertheless, we have not studied the concept of ecotourism prior to the commencement of this thesis. Neither do we have any practical experience of the field, although we both have visited developing countries. One of us has travelled in China, while the other one has visited Costa Rica, Haiti, Indonesia, Jamaica, Malaysia, Mexico, St. Lucia and Thailand. We have visited these nations on short conventional tourism vacations with recreational purposes. Although we may overlook some aspects due to our limited prior knowledge of ecotourism, we believe it will allow us to commence the study open-minded. Based on the initial literature review, we find ecotourism to be intriguing, possibly satisfying travelling demands while recognising economic, social and environmental concerns. However, we also experience that the initial literature review shows that the concerns of sustainable development somewhat contradict each other. Therefore, it is our understanding that ecotourism acknowledges the concerns of sustainable development, although some trade-offs may be inevitable.

Although we do not consider that these beliefs, derived from the academic debate on ecotourism and sustainable development, will tinge the study’s theoretical and practical approach to a large extent, it is important to highlight our preconceptions as they may influence how we critically reflect upon the theoretical framework and the empirical data. While we aim to base our analysis and conclusions on the theoretical framework
we will develop instead of our subjective opinions, we still encourage the reader to keep our preconceptions in mind when assessing the contributions of this thesis.

2.2 Research philosophy and approach

2.2.1 Reality and the researcher’s role

The aim of this thesis is to examine how ecotourism tour operators handle the three dimensions of sustainable development, and in turn how this may result in trade-offs between economic, social and environmental concerns. By assessing the situation of the respondents, we are looking towards emphasising their subjective reality. However, we do believe an objective reality beyond human interpretation and understanding simultaneously exists, e.g. the understanding of phenomena like environmental protection or degradation, poverty reduction, and economic growth. As chapter 5 will show, the companies we will include in our study will all be sustainable tourism certified, ranking the organisations according to the external and objective perception of their contribution to sustainable development. Nevertheless, we believe that individual actors of the companies ultimately define, interpret and give meaning to these concepts and criteria subjectively. In other words, we adhere to the ontological stance of critical realism, stressing the interplay between how the world is objectively observed and its phenomena are understood by small groups collectively or individuals subjectively (cf. Hodgkinson & Starkey, 2012, p. 608; Snape & Spencer 2003, p. 13, 16). This ontological stance, combining individual and collective representations of reality, may make our understanding of reality multifaceted, capturing and communicating the essence of the reality subjected to our study.

When creating an understanding of the organisations and respondents we wish to approach, we as researchers and the phenomena that are to be examined are interrelated and may prove to influence each other throughout the research process (cf. Snape & Spencer, 2003, p. 13). As a result, the way in which we present the reality we aim to investigate is affected by our interpretations of the replies of the respondents. As explained in further detail in chapter 5 Research strategy, the data will be collected on location in Costa Rica, where we will be placed in the context of the respondents participating in our study. Therefore, we are embedded in the research context, being social actors ourselves, interpreting the objective and subjective aspects of the situations we are examining on the basis of our preconceptions and theoretical frame of reference. Consequently, our epistemological position is in line with the notions of interpretivism (cf. Snape & Spencer 2003, p. 17).

2.2.2 Research approach

In order for us to examine the scientific area of concern, this thesis will have its starting point in theories on ecotourism and sustainable development. Instead of generating new theories, we intend to interpret the study’s results from a theoretical framework, gaining insight on theoretical ideas. Although not formulating hypotheses, our study follows the deductive research approach, where our interpretation of the trade-offs of ecotourism will be based on pre-established theories (cf. Patel & Davidsson, 2003, p. 23). The deductive approach has been related to ontological and epistemological stances different than our own, mostly to quantitative studies, but it does not refute the possibility of using the approach in qualitative studies (Hyde, 2000, p. 82), a method choice we will
explain in section 5.2 Data collection. The deductive approach is better suited for our study compared to the inductive, as the research of the latter commences from the empirical data instead of pre-existing theories (Johansson Lindfors, 1993, p. 58).

2.3 Research perspective

The study will be conducted through a societal perspective. The thesis will investigate how ecotourism tour companies manage the three dimensions of sustainable development, which in turn may result in trade-offs between economic, social and environmental interests. These trade-offs will have an effect on the local communities in which the ecotourism tour operators are situated. Therefore, the overall impact of the companies’ handling of the concerns of sustainable development is of interest to society. However, the trade-offs are also of interest to the companies that contribute to them and to the policy makers of the ecotourism industry as a whole.

2.4 Theoretical frame of reference

2.4.1 Acquisition of the theoretical framework

In order to investigate how ecotourism can contribute to sustainable development in Costa Rica, a stable basis consisting of a theoretical frame of reference is required. In this study, the main part of the theoretical chapter will consist of theories related to ecotourism and sustainable development. Therefore, our theoretical framework will highlight academic discussions on sustainability, the triple bottom line and greenwashing to name a few. We believe that these theories combined will provide a solid foundation for the empirical investigation and the following discussion.

In addition to scientific articles and books that we will get access to through Umeå University’s library webpage, it is likely that some scientific publications that we have become familiar with during previous courses will be used if we find them applicable to this study. Moreover, if we perceive a specific magazine our volume number as highly relevant, other scientific articles from the same volume may be included. However, we will not use articles and books on the only deterrent that the studies appear relevant to our research at first sight. In our perspective, it is important to find theoretical studies that are conducted in a development country context, since this likely would increase the possibility of using theories that are clearly applicable to the context of our study. Thus, a significant part of the theoretical data that will be used in this research will be gathered first and foremost by scrutinising scientific articles and books that are directly connected to the situation of developing countries.

2.4.2 Eligibility criteria

The theoretical framework is materialised by using the search engines accessible at Umeå University’s library resources, mainly EBSCO HOST and the databases Business Source Premier, Academic Search Elite and E-Journals. For more detailed information on the search words and their results, see Appendix I. The search words have been used both in general and in specific combinations, e.g. searching for ecotourism articles in general, and in specific business and developing country contexts. In addition, Costa Rica is incorporated for problematisation reasons. This approach allows us to find sources related to the study’s developing context, without disregarding general aspects that may be relevant. The sources are not limited to those of business administrative
nature, since both ecotourism and sustainable development may be considered as multidisciplinary academic fields (cf. Cole, 2006; Córdoba Azcárate, 2006; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2009; Hunt & Stronza, 2009, p. 1; Reid & Schwab, 2006, p. 2), we will also look to include references from the academic fields of ecology, anthropology, sociology etc. Literature concerning the academic starting point and research strategy will mainly be found in the methodological literature collection of Umeå University’s library.

When assessing the search results, we will read each article’s abstract to sift out articles to be reviewed in further detail. The literature search will mainly include scientific articles and books from 2002 and ahead on theories relating to ecotourism, from 1987 and ahead on theories on sustainable development, and from 1984 and ahead on stakeholder theory. These years have been vital to the debate on ecotourism, sustainable development, and stakeholder theory respectively. 2002 was the International Year of Ecotourism, a key year bringing official, non-governmental and international organisations, academics, community representatives, and individuals with an interest in ecotourism together to “identify some agreed principles and priorities for the future development and management of ecotourism” (UNWTO & UNEP, 2002, p. 7). 1987, however, was influential to sustainable development, as the Brundtland commission presented their now classical theories on sustainable development (WCED, 1987). The theories are still relevant and used in more recent literature (e.g. Barkemeyer, 2011; Cole, 2006; Donohoe & Needham, 2006). Finally, 1984 was a significant year for the stakeholder theory debate, as Freeman (1984) published his definition of the concept. Although the term was used prior to 1984, Freeman’s (1984) definition has been important to the evolution of stakeholder theory (Achterkamp & Vos, 2008, p. 750).

Sources may be relevant despite them being presented before either 2002 or 1987. Since earlier sources may be referred to in respected scientific journals and books during recent years, they can be considered as applicable and relevant to our research. These sources will, however, be used with discretion and consideration to their date of publication. In addition, in the methodology chapters, older references might be used if we assess them as relevant in our research. Furthermore, we aim to only use peer-reviewed scientific articles and books in order to increase the credibility and academic significance of the theoretical frame of reference. In addition, we refrain from using secondary references to avoid any misinterpretations of the original sources. Instead, the articles we find through our search phrases may refer us forward to other articles of relevance to our study. However, if a researcher refers to his or her own previous work, or referred to someone he or she has interviewed, we consider the source reliable since the person should know his or her own research by heart. Therefore, secondary references may be used in this research, but these sources are still considered as reliable.

In addition to the use of scientific articles, material published by public institutions, e.g. the United Nations (UN) and World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), will be used. In line with Bansal’s (2002, p. 123-124) discussion, we believe such organisations to be important to the evolution of the sustainable development agenda, influencing the prospects of societal development. The same argument applies to civic and social organisations as, e.g. Global Urban Development (GUD). These sources are primarily accessed through Google and Google Scholar. Although using search phrases similar to those used when searching for scientific articles, the results are not listed in Appendix I. As Google allows fewer search criteria, the number of hits will limit our ability to go through all the results in the same way as the articles accessed through EBSCO HOST.
3. Theoretical frame of reference

In this chapter, the theoretical frame of reference will be established. First, ecotourism and its relationship to sustainability will be examined. Then, sustainable development will be introduced and analysed in terms of economic, social and environmental aspects. Finally, ecotourism and sustainable development will be interconnected ending with a discussion on trade-offs of the dimensions of sustainable development in the context of ecotourism.

3.1 Sustainable development

3.1.1 The evolvement of sustainable development

The concept of sustainable development, commonly referred to as sustainability (Kaufman, 2009, p. 383), primarily emerged during the late 1980s, defined by WCED (1987, ch. 2, para. 1) as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability for future generations to meet their own needs”. At this time, small and privately owned companies were the predecessors of true sustainable development whereas larger firms initially were more concerned with publishing sustainability reports as a way of improving brand image (MacLean, 2010, p. 105). Since then, the subject has been continuously debated, evolving from a relatively simplistic approach into a more complex matter where the aspects of economic, social and environmental concerns are incorporated (Hall & Page, 2006, p. 250). Nevertheless, Holden (2008, p. 169) describes that the generational aspect highlighted by WCED (1987, ch. 2, para. 1) remains important when discussing sustainable development.

A year that can be considered as critical for sustainable development is 1992, when the UN published the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. This publication presents 27 principles of sustainable development, aiming to partly work towards protecting the integrity of the global environmental and development system and recognising the interdependence of the Earth’s nature (UN, 1992). Ten years later, UN’s principles of sustainable development set the basis for the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development. This report aims to provide an implementation plan on sustainable development, set light on the importance of incorporating the three pillars of sustainable development and the interrelations of these dimensions (UN, 2002).

Exemplifying the aspects further, global changes in the environment have pushed countries worldwide, especially developing ones, toward reconsidering their own impact on their immediate natural environment (e.g. Sobhani et al., 2009, p. 168). For instance, if the environment is damaged, countries highly dependent on tourism may suffer significantly from income loss as tourists may travel to other locations that fulfil their requirements and reach their natural expectations (e.g. Gössling & Hall, 2006, p.
Nevertheless, evaluating the true consequences of one’s effort within sustainable development is complicated as it might be difficult to choose appropriate indicators as the issue is context dependent (Hall & Page, 2006, p. 327).

3.1.2 The triple bottom line

Prior research in sustainable development has primarily focused on economic aspects, something Elkington (1994) found insufficient, arguing that social and environmental concerns should be included. This idea was named the triple bottom line, considering economic, social and environmental factors as the basis of sustainable development (Cam, 2013, p. 89; Coffman & Umemoto, 2010, p. 608; Mitchell et al. 2008, p. 67; Smith & Sharicz, 2011, p. 73-74; Stoddard et al., 2012, p. 235). Often, these factors are referred to as profit, people and planet (Slaper & Hall, 2011, p. 4; Tullberg, 2012, p. 310), but in this study we refer to the dimensions as economic, social and environmental concerns. Furthermore, the triple bottom line is illustrated in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4 The triple bottom line of sustainable development

The triple bottom line can be used to organise reflections and real actions with an emphasis on sustainability (Mitchell et al., 2008, p. 67). A fundamental stand of this concept is that multiple stakeholders should benefit from an organisation’s operations, not exclusively shareholders (Stoddard et al., 2012, p. 235). As seen in Figure 4, the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development sometimes overlap. In this situation, both the social and environmental influences have been
diminished while, at the same time, the company’s economic return has been optimised (Nguyen & Slater, 2010, p. 5). This circumstance is referred to as the sustainable, or sustainability, “sweet spot” of sustainable development, possibly illustrating how companies can reach business success in the long term without social and environmental harm (cf. Nguyen & Slater, 2010, p. 5; Savitz & Weber, 2007, p. 17).

Moreover, proponents of the triple bottom line consider the model to contribute to valuable insight in the area of sustainable development (e.g. Coffman & Umemoto, 2010, p. 608; Pava, 2007). However, it is important to keep in mind that the academic discourse about the triple bottom line is twofold; there are numerous scholars criticising the concept. According to Barkin (1996, p. 265), sustainable development is a utopian concept, a concept that is hard for companies to fully live up to. Some argue that it is not a solution to global scale problems of sustainable development (Ehrenfeld, 2004, p. 2) and that the practical implications of the triple bottom line is challenging (Slaper & Hall, 2011, p. 8), if not profoundly non-existent (e.g. MacDonald & Norman, 2007; Norman & MacDonald, 2004). Indeed, the most recurring criticism emphasises the measurability difficulties of sustainability (MacDonald & Norman, 2007, p. 113; Slaper & Hall, 2011, p. 4), especially related to the social and environmental dimensions (e.g. Bansal, 2002, p. 127; Norman & MacDonald, 2004, p. 250; Pava, 2007, p. 108; Stoddard et al., 2012, p. 247).

According to Ehrenfeld (2004, p. 4), in a sustainable development context, there is a significant difference between sustainability and unsustainability. He claims that it is possible to manage and decrease unsustainability while sustainability is aspirational by nature and thus cannot be measured. Pava (2007, p. 108), who generally is positive towards the triple bottom line concept, agree upon the measurability concerns while arguing “but blaming the advocates of triple bottom line reporting for this failure is to blame the only group that has noticed this problem and is trying to remedy it”. The triple bottom line should rather serve as a metaphor for the multifaceted nature of corporate performance and, instead of being criticised, become a subject of further research and improvement (Pava, 2007, p. 108).

### 3.1.3 Greenwashing in the context of the triple bottom line

Even though the triple bottom line debate clearly is twofold, scholars representing both sides of the discourse have agreed upon that there is a risk that companies will abuse the triple bottom line approach in a way that primarily satisfy their own needs (cf. Norman & MacDonald, 2004, p. 255; Pava, 2007, p. 109). In the context of sustainable development, such actions may be referred to as greenwashing (e.g. Najam, 1999), described by Corporate Watch (2001) as “disinformation disseminated by an organisation so as to present an environmentally responsible public image”. According to Ramus and Montiel (2005, p. 378), greenwashing of the triple bottom line may serve as a way to build company brand, reinforcing stakeholder relationships and strengthen the company’s market position. With reference to the same scholars, this may be done through sustainability policies. Thus, these “efforts” can easily be communicated through various marketing activities (Stoddard et al., 2012, p. 235), abusing the triple bottom line as a mean to create a false company image. Hence, an organisation would logically benefit significantly from promoting that a triple bottom line approach is used in the organisation. As Smith (2003, p. 60) claim, it is important for companies to nurture their brands if they aim to avoid being heavily scrutinised by their stakeholders.
At the same time, the triple bottom line approach is uneven; companies tend to focus their efforts on improving profitability by promoting social and environmentally responsible behaviour (Utting, 2000, p. 5, 18).

Furthermore, since there are measurement issues related to the triple bottom line approach, organisations may relatively easily hide their dubious activities and limited accountability (Stoddard, 2010, p. 244). Yet, there are no generally accepted measurements of economic, social and environmental concern (Moore et al., 2003, p. 353; Slaper & Hall, 2011, p. 5), permitting companies to individually choose appropriate and/or strategic indicators that favour the organisation (e.g. Norman & MacDonald, 2004, p. 255, 256; Pava, 2007, p. 109). Therefore, verifying one’s triple bottom line reports could be useful in order to hold a company accountable for its actions (Laufer, 2003, p. 259).

However, there are serious attempts to create consistent sustainability reporting frameworks. For instance, Mitchell et al. (2008) have initiated a framework for how to evaluate reports on the triple bottom line, aiming to ease the reporting processes of companies. A more common example is that the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) has developed explicit guidelines for sustainability reporting, with the intention to provide universal sustainability indicators and principles of report design (GRI, 2011, p. 3). The suggested indicators are categorised into economic, social and environmental concerns and provide clear instructions on what to measure and describe the contextual basis of the specific category (GRI, 2011, p. 25ff.). Even though these guidelines are perceived as useful, organisations and communities still do not follow the same reporting standards. Nevertheless, Slaper and Hall (2011, p. 5) claims that not adopting to any universal standard of sustainability measurements is preferable since it enables companies to customise their reports to the contextual basis of where they are operating.

On the other hand, Laufer (2003, p. 259) argues that external audits based on set criteria are more useful. Otherwise, the choice of not allowing external assessment will “strongly undermine an appearance of legitimacy” (Laufer, 2003, p. 259). A company may therefore choose to seek an ecocertification, by complying with the criteria of the certification bodies (Beaumont, 2011, p. 135-136). These certification systems often force companies to implement “extensive environmentally friendly practices and management systems, and has tended to put some of them at the upper end of the price scale” (Beaumont, 2011, p. 136). The question still remains what the true intentions of seeking certification are, if the attempts to externally verify ones eoinitiatives are solely aimed at “reputation assurance and risk management” (O’Dwyer, 2001, p. 33).

3.1.4 Economic growth, prosperity and development

Economic growth is key to ensure a nation’s socio-economic development and human progression prospects (Ailenei & Mosora, 2011, p. 6; Mukherjee & Kathuria, 2006, p. 39). However, growth is not enough in its own right as it can coexist with both prevalent inequality and environmental degradation (WCED, 1987, ch. 2, para. 6). As Mukherjee and Kathuria’s (2006, p. 51) research on growth in India shows, economic growth may result in significant environmental degradation. This as economic growth is dependent on the world’s finite resources, adding to the production of waste and resource depletion (Low et al., 2011, p. 6138). Additionally, imbalanced growth may accentuate international power differences (Ailenei & Mosora, 2011, p. 6). Growth does
neither lead to enduring economic development nor reduce the gap between the rich and the poor by default. Especially as the global economic order is unfair and there is an unmistakable problem of equitably distributing growth between nations and social groups (cf. Bretschger & Valente, 2011, p. 832; Guiga & Rejeb, 2012, p. 471, 478; Pogge, 2005, p. 4). It is therefore important to counteract global inequality, in favour of economic stability, growth and equitable wealth distribution (Malinen, 2012, p. 210).

The global distribution of consumption and production may hinder the reduction of inequalities between developed and less developed geographically disperse nations. The nations and individuals driving consumption and demand are often geographically and developmentally distanced from where production takes place (Bansal, 2002, p. 123; cf. Pogge, 2005, p. 6). If worldwide production efficiency is increased, Ehrenfeld (2004, p. 2) highlights that wealthy developed nations are likely to get better yields than their less developed counterparts, increasing their wealth and stimulating their consumption. However, the environmental impact of richer, developed nations is disproportionately larger than that of poorer, less developed nations (Pogge, 2005, p. 6). Still, rich nations reap the benefits of increased global production and resource utilisation while producing nations merely get to face the environmental consequences due to the increased global consumption of their national natural resources (Pogge, 2005, p. 6-7). Nevertheless, it may not be enough to make consumption patterns more sustainable as “we will not be better off as a society than we are now, if our conception of a good life remains centred on consumption” (Kaufman, 2009, p. 387).

However, Anand and Sen (2000, p. 2031) stress that the contribution of economic prosperity and an “opulence-oriented approach” should not be neglected if it caters for social and public concerns. Further, Bansal (2002, p. 123) argues that it will be impossible for present and future generations to secure their well-being without economic development. Therefore, companies and communities can contribute to enduring economic development by increasing their efficiency, realising sustainable cost reductions through the efficient use of resources (Nixon & Weiss, 2011, p. 3). An amplified economic performance will allow organisations and communities to focus on reducing their environmental and social impact (cf. Bansal, 2002, p. 123; Edgeman & Hensler, 2001, p. 86, 89). Environmental and social accomplishments are in other words luxuries that all organisations and communities cannot afford (cf. McKercher, 1993, p. 10; Moeller et al., 2011, p. 156). Still, while the environmental impact of the rich remains larger than that of the poor (Pogge, 2005, p. 6-7), the population of poorer nations are less able to attend to the situation due to their limited assets (Everett, 1997, p. 147; Onestini, 2012, p. 33; WCED, 1987, ch. 9, para. 9). This increased environmental and social focus may be realised through increased employment and social programs, and the investment in communal sustainability education and workforce skills (Bansal, 2002, p. 123; Nixon & Weiss, 2011, p. 3). In fact, the leveraging of knowledge has been appointed as key to both the survival of businesses and economic development (Cantú et al., 2009, p. 154, 169; Haq, 2012, p. 45; Matthiessen et al., 2006, p. 14-15).

However, economic development also results in “profound alterations to the world’s major ecosystems and the valuable benefits that they provide” (Barbier, 2011, p. 234). Therefore, nations and enterprises that are highly dependent on their ecosystems have to manage their natural resources to maintain economic sustainability, otherwise further encouraging unsustainability (e.g. Barbier, 2011, p. 236; Mukherjee & Kathuria, 2006, p. 39). However, organisations often fail to contribute to sustainability outside their
business boundaries. They need to acknowledge and act upon the fact that they are a part of, and embedded within, a community, society and larger cultural structure in order to contribute to enduring economic development (Ehrenfeld, 2004, p. 6).

3.1.5 Social concerns, well-being and equity

It is important to acknowledge the larger structure in which companies, communities and individuals are embedded and that everyone is interdependent of each other (Bansal, 2002, p. 123-124; Ehrenfeld, 2004, p. 6). It is therefore important that the overall interest of society is incorporated into business and communal activities (e.g. Nguyen & Slater, 2010, p. 7). As Brown and Flynn (2008) argues, companies may choose to engage their stakeholders, i.e. individuals, communities, consumers, shareholders etc., and incorporate stakeholder values and ideas in their business practices. By acknowledging the stakeholders and the greater societal good, the social-equity and fairness principles are promoted, something that contributes to meeting the social rights of individuals (cf. Bansal, 2002, p. 123; Kaufman, 2009, p. 384). However, enterprises are by nature often focused on economic principles and profitability, not making them sustainable from the perspective of society and communal groups (Bansal, 2002, p. 124).

Therefore, Bansal (2002, p. 127) argues that it is important to comply with the social and environmental dimensions in order to fully contribute to sustainable development.

Although sustainable development promotes equitable distribution of wealth, rights and well-being (Everett, 1997, p. 141), it has been suggested by advocates of sustainable development that poor individuals and community groups instigate resource depletion and environmental harm as they lack appropriate access to the resources needed for a good quality of life (Everett, 1997, p. 147; Onestini, 2012, p. 33; WCED, 1987, ch. 9, para. 9). Pogge (2009, p. 5) stress that if this unjust situation is left unaddressed, communities, organisations and other institutions will only prove to harm those less fortunate and contribute to the principle of social inequality.

However, there are ways out of these patterns of social inequality. An example from Kerala, India shows that investments in infrastructure, education and health can thwart social injustice (Pogge, 2009, p. 5). Another example is the approach by Woolworths in South Africa, contributing to socio-economic development by participating in the social inclusion of minors, education, community involvement and employment (Dos Santos et al., 2013, p. 107). Both cases highlight the importance of education, an initiative that can encourage social progress and allow communities and individuals to become more equal (Dunn & Hart-Steffes, 2012, p. 73; Fukuda-Parr, 2003, p. 308). In order to promote development, it is important to increase the public’s knowledge and abilities, and to allow them to contribute to everyday activities (Fukuda-Parr, 2003, p. 303).

It should also be acknowledged that it is important to invest in the well-being of individuals to ensure social development (Fukuda-Parr, 2003, p. 308). The sustainability literature, epitomised by the Brundtland Commission’s argument that sustainable development is concerned with meeting present needs without compromising future generation’s capacity to fulfil theirs (WCED, 1987, ch. 2, para. 6). However, Anand and Sen (2000, p. 2038) argue that the sustainability discussion has mostly focused on not compromising future needs. They continue by claiming that it would be fundamentally wrong “if we were to be obsessed about intergenerational equity without at the same seizing the problem of intragenerational equity” (Anand & Sen, 2000, p. 2038). In
addition, Kaufman (2009, p. 389) encourages the entitlement of all individuals as equals, regardless of whether they belong to present or future generations.

3.1.6 Environmental responsibility, protection and resource conservation

As a result of social and economic development, the environment and finite natural resources have become continuously depleted (Nguyen & Slater, 2010, p. 5). As Bretschger and Valente (2011, p. 837) discuss, less developed nations are more vulnerable to climate change and resource exhaustion. Additionally, countries that are highly dependent on the state of their ecosystems to secure their income, e.g. through tourism, agriculture, forestry etc., need to consider the importance of managing their natural resources in order to maintain economic sustainability (Gamage & Boyle, 2008, p. 50; Mukherjee & Kathuria, 2006, p. 39). Local ecosystems face an inadequate regeneration potential if environmental resources will continue to be neglected by reckless environmental behaviour (Bansal, 2002, p. 123; Barbier, 2011, p. 234). As Bansal (2002, p. 123) argues, companies have contributed to global resource depletion by emitting hazardous gases into the atmosphere, deforestation and other unsustainable business activities. To enable these companies to contribute to sustainable development they have to alter their behaviour significantly (Ehrenfeld, 2004, p. 1).

If these environmental issues are left unaddressed it may lead to devastating consequences for businesses globally. As a result, the productivity of companies will go down, the access to valuable resources will plunge, and the cost structure of both healthcare and business related insurance will increase (Brown & Flynn, 2008, p. 40). Disruption and change have had a noteworthy effect on developing nations, increasing the issue of how social and environmental impact should be managed (Sobhani et al., 2009, p. 168). As the business context of Bangladesh shows, companies are getting further compelled to invest in socially and environmentally sustainable business activities (Sobhani et al., 2009, p. 168).

According to Onestini (2012, p. 34), one example of the potential difficulties with environmental concern is that the Latin American region has embraced the environmental dimension of sustainable development but failed to reduce its dependence on natural resources to sustain production and economic development. The issue is therefore not that there is a lack of public acceptance of the importance of being environmentally responsible, it is rather that people’s overdependence on unsustainable means constraints the implementation of sustainability (cf. Onsetini, 2012, p. 34). As WCED (1987, ch. 1, para. 40) argues, “development cannot subsist upon a deteriorating environmental resource base”. Hence, the environment’s exhaustible resources should be protected (Barbier, 2011, p. 235). Companies, communities and individuals therefore have to consider environmental concerns, and not only socio-economic issues, in order to contribute to sustainable development (cf. Liu et al., 2012, p. 163).

In order for companies to become environmentally sustainable, they have to allow the sustainability perspectives to permeate their entire organisations, their value systems, corporate culture and employee attitudes rather than just adhering to a number of sustainability principles, “it is a new way of thinking” (Nguyen & Slater, 2010, p. 7). Enterprises also have to engage communities and policy-makers to counteract and respond to the effects of environmental degradation. This stakeholder engagement initiative may allow companies to sustain their immediate environment (Brown & Flynn,
Additionally, Ehrenfeld (2004, p. 8) points out that it is important to approach environmental concerns holistically, taking the all-inclusive lifecycle aspect of both services and products into consideration. Moreover, to ensure the incorporation of economic, social and environmental concerns, it is important that companies create a sufficient community and organisational learning environment (Kearney & Zuber-Skerritt, 2011, p. 402; Smith & Sharicz, 2011, p. 79). Knowledge is collected for the collective good in learning communities (Kearney & Zuber-Skerritt, 2011, p. 402) while organisational learning allow companies to “create, capture, harvest, shape and apply sustainability-related knowledge and insights” (Smith & Sharicz, 2011, p. 79).

3.2 Tourism

The notion of travelling with the intention to spend one’s vacation at a distant location is generally recognised as tourism (Holden, 2008, p. 1). Numerous tourism definitions have been formed, one of them by the UN together with the World Trade Organization (WTO) (1994, p. 5), stating that “tourism comprises the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes”. The concept of tourism is a relatively young phenomenon, emerging with the extensive infrastructure development of railways during the 19th century (Holden, 2008, p. 2). Since then, the infrastructure has advanced rapidly, creating more global travelling opportunities by e.g. introducing air travel. According to Gössling and Peeters (2007, p. 402), this has enabled tourists to travel to more distant locations and spend fewer days abroad during each vacation.

Tourism is annually increasing, illustrated by 1.035 billion international tourists during 2012, in comparison to 996 million in 2011 (UNWTO, 2013b). More specifically, most tourists were travelling to developing countries (UNWTO, 2013b) and the international tourism market share of developing countries is continuously increasing (Mitchell, 2012, p. 457). In order to allow further industry growth, tourism and tourism companies are in general are dependent on the inflow of travellers and the financial resources they are willing to spend (cf. Kim et al., 2010, p. 349). Tourism is a competitive industry that is vulnerable to customer demand and needs (Buhalis, 2000, p. 107; Nash & Martin, 2003, p. 162; Song & Witt, 2011, p. 124). Nevertheless, since the industry is growing, one might wonder which effects tourism may have on a local, regional, national and global level. Numerous researchers have investigated these issues, concluding that there are both benefits and setbacks related to tourism (e.g. Cleverdon & Kalisch, 2000, p. 172; Hall & Page, 2006, p. 162; Khizindar, 2012, p. 626; Schneider, 1993).

Tourism can provide benefits through encouraging industries and enhancing the quality of life of human beings (Okuyama, 2012, p. 393). On the other hand, a common problem with tourism is the overrepresentation multinational corporations, resulting in significant parts of tourism related income and benefits not remaining in countries in which they are generated (Hall & Page, 2006, p. 120). As Baker and Coulter (2007, p. 250) describe, there is “an irony about the promotion of an industry which, in theory, could be of economic benefit to many of the world’s poorest countries but which, if circumstances were to become unfavourable, could leave those involved even more vulnerable than they were before tourism was introduced”. Therefore, benefits and setbacks of tourism should be approached cautiously since the impacts of such an activity may be circumstantially dependent (e.g. Khizindar, 2013, p. 633).
3.3 Ecotourism

According to UNWTO (2012b, p. 1), ecotourism is one of the most rapidly expanding forms of tourism. Ecotourism evolved as an antithesis of conventional mass-tourism, opposing the negative effects of international travel flows (Sharpley, 2006, p. 8). Since the concept’s emergence in the 1980’s, ecotourism has been defined by numerous authors (Beaumont, 2011, p. 135). This could likely origin from the notion that ecotourism is a complex concept (e.g. Buckley, 2003, p. 76). In addition, ecotourism has multiple synonyms and/or resembling expressions, including e.g. sustainable, responsible and ethical tourism (Carter et al., 2004, p. 46). These, in combination with even more similar concepts like soft, green and nature tourism naturally contribute to the complex nature of defining the concept of ecotourism and thereby cause confusion (e.g. Williams, 2009, p. 112). Table 1 presents several definitions of ecotourism that have been stated by researchers, organisations and public institutions within the fields of tourism and ecotourism specifically.

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<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Ecotourism definition</th>
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<td>TIES (1990)</td>
<td>‘Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people.’</td>
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<td>Wallace and Pierce (1996, p. 848)</td>
<td>‘Travelling to relatively undisturbed natural areas for study, enjoyment, or volunteer assistance. It is travel that concerns itself with flora, fauna, geology, and ecosystems of an area, as well as the people (caretakers) who live nearby, their needs, their culture, and their relationship to the land […]’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Global Development Research Centre, GDRC (2002, p. 1-2)</td>
<td>‘[It] contributes actively to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, [it] includes local and indigenous communities in its planning, development and operation, and contributing to their well-being, [it] interprets the natural and cultural heritage of the destination to visitors, [it] lends itself better to independent travellers, as well as to organized tours for small size groups’</td>
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| Hall and Page (2006, p. 284) | ‘Any form of tourism development which is regarded as environmentally friendly and has the capacity to act as a branding mechanism for some forms of tourist products’  
‘Green’ or ‘nature-based’ tourism which is essentially a form of special interest tourism and refers to a specific market segment and the products are generated for that segment’  
‘A form of nature-based tourism that involves education and interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically and culturally sustainable’ |
| Honey (2008, p. 32-33) | ‘Ecotourism is to travel to fragile, pristine, and usually protected areas that strive to be low impact and (often) small scale. It helps educate the traveller, provides funds for conservation, directly benefits the economic development and political empowerment of local communities, and fosters respect for different cultures and for human rights’ |
| Cammorata (2013, p. 200) | ‘Traveling to a remote area to enjoy, protect, and bring awareness to endangered wildlife […] [It] is about having low impact on the environment – a “leave-no-trace” mindset – while also promoting conservation for the area’ |

Table 1: Definitions of ecotourism
Indeed, McLaren (1998, p. 97) argues that it is important to have a critical approach when dealing with the concept of ecotourism since it is considered as broad concept. As shown in Table 1, ecotourism definitions are not always evidently synonymous; each of them is presenting slightly different views of the concept. When examining Hall and Page’s (2009) three definitions, originated from earlier research by other scholars, the definitions are not uniform since one of them is enhancing the branding possibilities of ecotourism while others more explicitly promote ecotourism as nature-based tourism in particular. The fact that there are so diverse conceptual definitions of ecotourism somewhat inhibits managers from successfully working with ecotourism as it is unclear how to implement and practice ecotourism (Donohoe & Needham, 2005a, cited in Donohoe & Needham, 2006, p. 192-193). Nevertheless, in the book “Words you should know: 2013 – The 201 words from science, politics, technology and pop culture that will change your life this year”, written by Cammorata (2013), ecotourism is mentioned as one of the important concepts for 2013, implying that ecotourism is current and here to stay.

However, it is possible to distinguish common denominators among the various definitions. One of them is the sustainability dimension consisting of economic, social and environmental factors. In this dimension, the major interest tends to be in the environmental aspect even though ecotourism usually distinguish from traditional tourism in case all of the three sustainability factors are combined (Beaumont, 2011, p. 135). Besides, nature and learning are two additional dimensions of ecotourism, implying that these factors are important in attracting tourists to ecotourism activities (Beaumont, 2001, cited in Beaumont, 2011, p. 136). This means that tourists are appealed by ecotourism since it is perceived as a learning opportunity where to create a deeper understanding for other cultures and, at the same time, experience the biodiversity of a foreign nation without affecting it negatively (Beaumont, 2001, cited in Beaumont, 2011, p. 136). Thereby, conservation activities are an important aspect of the concept of ecotourism (Andersson Cederholm & Hultman, 2006, p. 294).

Some organisations and public institutions take the definition of ecotourism one step further by examining numerous factors that characterise the concept, one of them being UNWTO (2002). They define ecotourism as a type of tourism that can be ascribed the following attributes;

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<td>1</td>
<td>All nature-based forms of tourism in which the main motivation of the tourists is the observation and appreciation of nature as well as the traditional cultures prevailing in natural areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>It contains educational and interpretation features.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>It is generally, but not exclusively organised by specialised tour operators for small groups. Service provider partners at the destinations tend to be small, locally owned businesses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>It minimises negative impacts upon the natural and socio-cultural environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>It supports the maintenance of natural areas which are used as ecotourism attractions by a) generating economic benefits for host communities, organisations and authorities managing natural areas with conservation purposes, b) providing alternative employment and income opportunities for local communities, and c) increasing awareness towards the conservation of natural and cultural assets, both among locals and tourists.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Attributes of ecotourism (UNWTO, 2002)
The ecotourism description in Table 2 is coherent with most of the definitions in Table 1, combining the viewpoints into one relatively extensive definition of ecotourism. Thereby, the ecotourism discussion lead by UNWTO (2002) enhances the notion of ecotourism as a complex phenomenon, indicating that several of the above mentioned definitions combined could be an appropriate way to define ecotourism. The terminological confusion is evident and nothing new (e.g. Fennell, 2008, p. 23), and this has been one of the contributing factors to scholars referring to the blurry terms as “alternative tourism”, including many, if not all, of the close related concepts of e.g. green tourism, sustainable tourism and ecotourism (e.g. Holden, 2008, p. 232-233).

All definitions collectively place high demands on those companies who wish to define or certify themselves as ecotourism companies or tour operators. However, the definitions of ecotourism could be considered as utopic (cf. Spilanis & Vayanni, 2004, p. 273). Many tourism companies are self-proclaimed ecotourism organisations “that do not fulfil the widely recognised core criteria of ecotourism […], discrediting those [companies] that do more or less follow the core criteria” (Fennell & Weaver, 2005, p. 373). In addition, companies that actually do follow the criteria often do so partially or in a weak manner, not optimising the effect of ecotourism operators in terms of the three dimensions of sustainable development (Fennell & Weaver, 2005, p. 373-374).

3.4 The sustainable development of ecotourism

Even though ecotourism may be approached from numerous angles in terms of definitions, scholars agree that sustainability concern needs to be incorporated in the tourism sector in order for this industry to become sustainable in the long-term (Williams, 2009, p. 112). In this sense, one might argue that ecotourism can serve as a catalyst for including sustainable efforts into the tourism industry.

Indeed, scholars like e.g. Ţeţeanică and Vlavian-Gurmeza (2010, p. 481ff.), inspired by Theobald’s (1998) research, argue that ecotourism has three prerequisites; namely local participation, economic opportunities for the local population and respect for ecotourism integrity, implying that ecotourism development should be small-scaled and enabled through the use of local resources. Without further difficulties, it is apparent that there are similarities between the proposed ecotourism elements and the three fundamental dimensions of sustainability, i.e. economic, social and environmental concern. As a matter of fact, Xu et al. (2009, p. 30) describe that ecotourism is highly linked to minimised negative environmental and social effects in the tourism destination examined. Furthermore, sustainable tourism is aimed at balancing economic growth, environmental conservation and social justice while contributing to sustainable development (Akama & Kieti, 2007, p. 735).

These statements indicate that ecotourism and sustainable development go hand in hand. Having discussed both sustainable development and ecotourism, the following sections will explore ecotourism in terms of the three dimensions of sustainable development. However, both sustainable development and ecotourism have set goals difficult to fulfil (cf. Barkin, 1996, p. 265; Spilanis & Vayanni, 2004, p. 273). Therefore, many ecotourism activities only prove to contribute to sustainable development in limited ways, not giving the economic, social and environmental concerns the attention they deserve (cf. Fennell & Weaver, 2005, p. 373-374).
3.4.1 Economic concerns, economic leakage and consumption patterns

As earlier mentioned, economic growth is of major importance in order to secure national socio-economic development and human progression prospects (Ailenei & Mosora, 2011, p. 6; Mukherjee & Kathuria, 2006, p. 39). However, if tourism companies only consider their products as means toward short-term profit maximisation, tourism will in the long-run neglect the needs of local communities and their natural environment (Cater, 1995, p. 24). Even though the tourism industry generates vast income in developing nations, scholars therefore argue that these economical resources do not necessarily benefit the country providing the tourism opportunities (Lebel et al., 2010, p. 224; Mitchell, 2012, p. 458).

Actually, it is commonly prosed that economic leakage is current in the tourism industry (Akama & Kieti, 2007, p. 746; Chon & Maier, 2010, p. 68; Koons et al., 2009, p. 1227; Nelson, 2013, p. 170; Slob & Wilde, 2006, p. 8; Xu et al., 2009, p. 34-35). Tour operators on an international basis as well as foreign-owned accommodation providers contribute to economic leakage in the tourism sector (Brohman, 1996, p. 53, 55; Jules, 2005, p. 1-2, 28; Pleumarom, 2009, p. 4). One example is the large multinational all-inclusive chains that have established themselves as a result of consumer demand for all-inclusive travel options. This trend has been accused of limiting the benefits received by the local communities, allowing little room for local influences and interaction (Issa & Jayawardena, 2003, p. 168). More specifically, the economic leakage within the specific area of ecotourism has, to our knowledge, not yet been estimated. Nevertheless, the tourism sector as a whole is assigned up to 56 per cent economic leakage in some developing nations (Jules, 2005, p. 2) while the United Nations Environmental Programme, UNEP (2013), estimate the same number to be up to 80 per cent depending on the context of the country examined. These arguments questions if, and to what extent, tourism and especially ecotourism may contribute to sustainable development in an economic perspective. Clearly, the context seems to be important for the true contributions to economic growth. As an example, Ardahaey, (2011, p. 210) describes that the emergence of multinational companies has underpinned high economic leakage in the tourism industry and by that, contributed to making development countries dependent on foreign investment.

However, even if the ecotourism income would not leak to other countries, it is still uncertain that locals are benefitting from the tourism operations in economic terms. As the research on the Wolong Nature Reserve in China by Xu et al. (2009, p. 34) reveals, it is common that non-local inhabitants are employed in the tourism sector. The tourism industry has witnessed this trend globally, partially due to the willingness of immigrant workers to work for less than the locals or because local employees lack the expertise of educated expatriate workers (Sadi & Henderson, 2005, p. 247-248). Although the problem is experienced globally, it is an issue specifically faced by developing nations, as the locals have “low skills and qualifications and lack of tourism expertise, [...] a major obstacle preventing the host population from participating effectively in tourism employment” (Liu & Wall, 2006, p. 163). Additionally, the wages distributed are not necessarily spent in the local area, neither by local nor expatriate employees, leading to extended economic leakage in the specific geographic area of investigation (cf. Nelson, 2013, p. 171; Yacob et al., 2008, p. 64).
Furthermore, the tourism sector differs from other industries in terms of consumption and production patterns. As McKercher (1993, p. 13) puts it, “tourism generates income by importing clients rather than by exporting its product”. Although not always being the case, some tourists interested in sustainable travelling activities are more willing to pay for ecotours, contesting the idea that ecotourism business activities should be disregarded as economically unviable (Moeller et al., 2011, p. 158, 166). Additionally, Dolnicar et al. (2008, p. 207) conclude that “all we really know about EFTs [environment-friendly tourists] is that they are more educated, earn more money and are interested in learning”. Therefore, it might be economically viable for companies to engage in ecotourism.

3.4.2 Social concerns, employment and social equity

In their research at the Osa Peninsula in Costa Rica, Zambrano et al. (2010, p. 73) found that local inhabitants were generally positive towards expanding the tourism sector since it could provide more working opportunities (cf. Lai & Nepal, 2006, p. 1117-1118). The tourism industry would ideally employ locals and thereby benefit local inhabitants through a steady source of income (Xu et al., 2009, p. 33). If this was the case, locals would possibly have financial opportunities to improve their living standards while at the same time truly feel that they contribute to the local society.

However, in reality, employing local inhabitants in the tourism sector in developing countries is not as easy as it may seem. There are numerous factors influencing the recruitment procedures, for instance, local residents may not possess the skills required for working within some areas of tourism (Xu et al., 2009, p. 34). For example, natural guides may be required to be bilingual, neglecting the poorest local inhabitants since they are unlikely to be able to finance such education. This implies that educational flaws may be one of the reasons why locals sometimes find it difficult to get employment in the tourism industry. Additionally, the argument of tourism as a stable source of income is questionable, as some scholars state that the wages are low and unstable (e.g. Slob & Wilde, 2006, p. 22; Weinberg et al., 2002, p. 377), and connected to a seasonal demand (Horton, 2009, p. 98). On the contrary, it is likely desired among less fortunate people to get employment in the tourism since the relatively low income is better than no income at all, even though the wages are commonly academically criticised (Funnell & Bynoe, 2007, p. 168).

Even though the social benefits of ecotourism are recognised, there are significant negative impacts that must not be forgotten. Just like conventional mass-tourism, it may underpin socially related concerns such as prostitution and drug abuse (Honey, 2003, p. 41; Zambrano et al., 2010, p. 78), as a large number of people from different areas of the world are able to meet and exchange experiences and possibly consume illegal substances. Although ecotourism has an objective to ensure the well-being of local communities (UNWTO, 2002), the increased exposure to prostitution and abuse caused by the tourism industry in general, in locations where ecotourism companies and conventional tourism operators co-exist may prove to result in local moral degradation (Khizindar, 2012, p. 626; Zambrano et al., 2010, p. 73).

In order to enable the ecotourism industry to contribute to local sustainable development, it is important to reduce social inequalities and make the local community members motivated to contribute to the protection of the local environment and culture.
The social perspective of ecotourism implies that the identity and culture of the locals, and their needs should be respected, allowing the communities where tourism activities take place to have a sense of ownership and pride of their background and society (cf. Budeanu, 2005, p. 91; Choi & Sirakaya, 2006, p. 1276). However, the risk is that the locals become exploited as mere attractions, altering their own ways of being to increase their commercial attractiveness (Budeanu, 2005, p. 91). On the other hand, Budeanu (2005, p. 91) also argue that the locals who are exposed to incoming tourists may be tempted to adopt the customs of the travellers, making the local culture more assimilated to the culture of the tourists and resulting in loss of the local community’s commercial appeal.

Moreover, in the context of ecotourism and the social dimension of sustainable development, the concern for social equity arises. Bansal (2002, p. 123) states that all people should have access to the same resources and that unequal treatment of human beings may lead to natural exploitation. With reference to the above discussion concerning employment within the ecotourism industry, it is important that locals have the same chance as others to be employed in the tourism sector. Furthermore, Bolay (2004, p. 105) explains that social equity, in combination with economic and environmental responsibility, is key to sustainable development in the long term. If local inequality persists, the poorest inhabitants will likely suffer the most from other aspects of negative tourism effects, for instance, the exploitation of natural resources (Mitchell, 2012, p. 458).

3.4.3 Ecotourism and environmental protection

As countries dependent on tourism are reliant on the state of their environment (Gamage & Boyle, 2008, p. 50; Mbaiwa, 2005, p. 204; Mukherjee & Kathuria, 2006, p. 39), ecotourism may prove to be a successful tourism strategy to ensure the protection of the environment (Zambrano et al., 2010, p. 79), one of the key aspects of sustainable development (e.g. Barbier, 2011, p. 233, 235; Liu et al., 2012, p. 163). If tourism companies fail to act upon the interest of the environment, they will only prove to contribute to future environmental degradation and resource depletion (Cater, 1995, p. 22). As Lóránt and Tünde (2010, p. 193) contend, tourism may on the other hand be sustainable if it acknowledges the natural ecosystem’s capacity and contributes to the regeneration of environmental resources. Similarly, tour operators may contribute to protect the local ecosystems of the destinations in which they operate by respecting the environment’s capacity and adopting policies that are ecologically sustainable (Mbaiwa, 2005, p. 224, cf. Liu, 2003, p. 464). Still, ecotourism utilises the environment, as the tours usually are nature-based (e.g. Beaumont, 2001, cited in Beaumont, 2011, p. 136; Cammorata, 2013, p. 200; Hall & Page, 2006, p. 284; Holden, 2003, p. 97; Honey, 2008, p. 284; UNWTO, 2002). However, formulating a sustainability policy is merely enough to foster sustainable development (e.g. Nguyen & Slater, 2010, p. 7).

As learned from the case of Lapa Rios, Costa Rica, ecotourism companies can instead contribute to the protection of their intermediate environment by investing in good employment practices, restrictive land-use policies and communal learning initiatives (Zambrano et al., 2010, p. 79; cf. Liu, 2003, p. 469-470). It is in other words important to approach issues of sustainability and environmental harm holistically, allowing the sustainability aspect to permeate a company’s entire corporate structure and business activities (cf. Ehrenfeld, 2004, p. 8). On the contrary, ecotourism companies may still
contribute to sustainable development although their tourism products not exclusively are related to nature-based activities. As a study on ecotourism in Thailand shows, it can be more important that the main concerns of the companies are to protect the ecosystem and foster an educational environment (Kontogeorgopoulos & Chulikavit, 2010, p. 638). The ecotourism companies may therefore contribute to fulfilling present and future environmental needs by engaging in sound environmental practices, securing their stake in the ecotourism industry (cf. Cater, 1995, p. 22).

However, when environmental areas get protected, local communities are often not allowed to contribute to the decisions on how the conservation processes should be managed (Cater, 1995, p. 23; de los Angeles Somarriba-Chang & Gunnarsdotter, 2012, p. 1026). As Brown and Flynn (2008, p. 40-41) suggests, stakeholder involvement is crucial to the design of environmentally responsible business practices to accommodate for the environmental aspects of sustainable development. If the needs of local communities are overlooked, tourism will in other words not become sustainable (Mbaiwa, 2005, p. 219). Nonetheless, examples from Kenya, Taiwan, Madagascar and China show that ecotourism often lack stakeholder and community engagement (Bruyere et al., 2009, p. 55; Lai & Nepal, 2006, p. 1125; Ormsby & Mannie, 2006, p. 283ff.; Xu et al., 2009, p. 35). This is questioning the somewhat utopic definitions provided in section 3.3 Ecotourism, as the proclaimed ecotourism operators frequently fail to meet their stakeholders’ needs (cf. Bruyere et al., 2009, p. 55; Lai & Nepal, 2006, p. 1125; Ormsby & Mannie, 2006, p. 283ff.; Xu et al., 2009, p. 35).

Despite this lack of attention for local interests, it is important that ecotourism raises community awareness of the importance of protecting local biodiversity, ecosystems and other fragile natural resources (UNWTO, 2002). This aligns perfectly with the idea that the communal learning perspective is key to ensure the prospects of sustainable development (Kearney & Zuber-Skerritt, 2011, p. 402). However, to ensure that companies, e.g. ecotourism tour intermediaries, capture valuable sustainable insights and enable the internal creation of sustainability initiatives, it is important that the internal learning environment is concrete (Smith & Sharicz, 2011, p. 79).

It is also important to ensure the tourist’s understanding of the natural experience (Kontogeorgopoulos & Chulikavit, 2010, p. 628). Tour operators have the opportunity to encourage the environmentally responsible behaviour of their clients (Mbaiwa, 2005, p. 222). The tour guides are crucial to ensure that the environmental responsibility aspect of sustainable development reaches the tourists. As Powell and Ham’s (2008, p. 478) research of a Galapagos tour operator shows, tour guides prove to impact tourists’ knowledge about sustainability issues and environmental conservation, and can make their behaviour and intentions more environmentally concerned.

3.4.4 Potential trade-offs between the pillars of sustainable development

When scrutinising the economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development in relation to ecotourism, it is apparent that these dimensions sometimes contradict each other. For instance, economic growth may simply satisfy one need from an economic perspective, while the low wages in the tourism industry are insufficient in order for local inhabitants to reach their desired living standard in a social point of view (cf. Ailenei & Mosora, 2011, p. 6; Slob & Wilde, 2006, p. 22). Several scholars have noticed the juxtaposition between the pillars of sustainable development (e.g. Bendell &
Kearins, 2005, p. 379; Coffman & Umemoto, 2010, p. 599; Mitchell, 2012, p. 463; Norman & MacDonald, 2004, p. 252-253; Slaper & Hall, 2011, p. 6). In practice, the ambition of making ecotourism operations live up to all the dimensions of sustainable development is unrealistic, since it is almost impossible to give all three pillars justice at once (Zambrano et al., 2010, p. 63). As an example, Khizindar (2012, p. 632) study on tourism’s effect on the quality of life of local residents in Saudi Arabia concludes that the economic aspect generally has a negative impact while the social and environmental dimensions lead to more positive effects on the locals’ quality of life.

The notion of trade-offs presupposes that companies can be plotted in a scheme over the factors examined (Coffman & Umemoto, 2010, p. 606), in this case the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development. Bendell and Kearins (2005, p. 379) argue that the economic dimension differs significantly from the social and environmental ones, since this pillar is required in order for a company to survive. Indeed, this indicates that companies always need to consider the economic pillar of sustainable development and the bottom line is that the economic dimension is obligatory while the social and environmental ones are, to a higher extent, optional from a business survival point of view. However, one might question if it would be ethically or morally wrong to completely ignore the social and environmental aspects.

The potential trade-offs may appear in different constellations, for instance, they can be between the environmental and social dimensions. In this context, there may be challenges if businesses contribute to sustainable social development by increasing the employability within the communities they operate as they may contribute to further resource depletion. In the case of the agricultural sector in India, increased employment have caused increased environmental degradation and put pressure on the environment used to produce agricultural crops (Mukherjee & Kathuria, 2006, p. 48). This example give light on the juxtaposition between the bottom lines, clearly illustrating that there are sometimes contradictions between the pillars of sustainable development.

Furthermore, employment in the tourism sector may provide incomes, but the income change in itself will not be enough to influence people’s behaviour when it comes to conservation (Stem et al., 2003a, p. 408). The limited behavioural change is, according to Stronza and Gordillo (2008, p. 451), indicating that the tourism related income might not change the socially and culturally related use of resources. In practice, this can be problematic since there is a significant risk that former employees will go back to their old patterns of behaviour if their financial incentives are withdrawn, especially if the environmental education is limited (Pretty & Smith, 2004, p. 636).

Moreover, the ecotourism sector is expanding, creating substantial risks since it is exploiting nature, and without proper control, it will have the same negative impact as traditional tourism (Holden, 2008, p. 244). In reality, this might mean that mass-tourism is fostered, increasing the tourism related revenues while the environment suffers significantly from extensive transportation routes etc. Sometimes, the environmental dimension is partly neglected in the model of sustainable development, whereas Coffman and Umemoto (2010, p. 609) suggest that ecological boundaries should somehow be framing the model of the triple bottom line. In addition, further tourism expansion may make the poorest inhabitants suffer the most if it results in further resource depletion, as it is restricting their access to the scarce resources they are dependent on (Mitchell, 2012, p. 458).
3.5 Extending the stakeholder theory discussion

3.5.1 Stakeholder theory in ecotourism

The previous sections have in various degrees touched upon the notion of stakeholder involvement and acknowledgement. The aspects of the three dimensions of sustainable development indicate the importance of taking different stakeholders into consideration when the issues of ecotourism and sustainable development are discussed. An early definition of stakeholders by Freeman (1984, p. 46) claims that an organisation’s stakeholder is “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of an organisation’s objectives”. While economic incentives have been pointed out as important to stakeholders, it is important to highlight that most stakeholders most certainly have alternative motives and that these motives are important to address in order to secure business success and attraction of stakeholders (Harrison & Wicks, 2013, p. 98). Especially since stakeholders “are actual or potential means/obstacles to corporate objectives” (Goodpaster, 1991, p. 59). In this context, it is important to promote companies’ stakeholder accountability; “the need for companies to be responsive to the needs and concern of their different stakeholders” (Utting, 2000, p. 5).

Stakeholder theory is key to the ecotourism debate and key to operators carrying out tours in their local environments. As Hardy and Beeton (2001, p. 173) discuss, the identification of stakeholders and their needs “can affect the outcomes, goals and directions of the management of tourism”. According to Powell and Ham (2008, p. 468), ecotourism’s sustainability perspective is in fact dependent on how different stakeholders recognise the connection between environmental, social and economic benefits. Traditional stakeholder theory is usually appropriated towards economic and social stakeholders (cf. Freeman, 1985; Harrison & Wicks, 2013). However, a more radical view is to include the environment as a stakeholder as well, as it “provides a great many of the constraints on, and possibilities for not only business life, but indeed on all aspects of human existence” (Phillips & Reichart, 2000, p. 188). In the mid-90s, Cater (1995, p. 21-22) presented that there are four main stakeholder groups of sustainable tourism activities, namely the local community, tourists, tourism companies and the actual environment itself (cf. Jamal & Stronza, 2009, p. 174). In addition, the WCED (1987, ch. 2, para. 1) concept of sustainable development par definition requires companies to act upon the stake of future generations, adding a new unconventional dimension to the stakeholder model.

3.5.2 Key stakeholders of ecotourism companies

If the local communities are involved and the ecotourism companies ensure that they get the benefits they deserve, the locals will be more prone to participate, as they will have “an incentive, and a challenge, to protect what the tourists come to see” (Crapper, 1998, p. 21). However, economic incentives may not be enough. As Stronza’s (2007, p. 212) research in Peru shows, some individuals may become more altruistic, while others simply continue with their potentially environmentally degrading way of life, fuelled by greater capital assets. Instead, one should look into the non-economic issues that enables or constraint the involvement of community stakeholders, how these stakeholders respond to the values, beliefs and attitudes that are introduced through ecotourism (Fletcher, 2009, p. 271, 279, 281). Regardless, it is important for the viability of sustainable forms of tourism that the local community has a sense of

Apart from the importance of local community inclusion, it may also be vital to identify the tourists as key to the viability of ecotourism. As Sharpley (2006, p. 8-9) underlines, “it is implicitly recognised in many definitions that responsible roles and behaviour on the part of (eco)tourists is an essential ingredient for the successful development of ecotourism”, acknowledging the ecotourism tour companies’ dependence on their customers to ensure the viability of their operations. According to Cole (2006, p. 633) it is important that an understanding for the tourists is enabled in order to make choices on how to develop tourism in local communities. Ecotourists are consumers of the ecotourism product interested in learning through responsible travelling (cf. McKercher, 1993, p. 11-12; Dolnicar et al., 2008, p. 207). Still, the sustainable motives of ecotourists have been questioned, as they are still similar to consumers looking for an escape away from everyday life and the problems that may entail (cf. Collins-Kreiner & Israeli, 2010, p. 137-138; McKercher, 1993, p. 11-12; Sharpley, 2006, p. 19). However, this idea is contested by highlighting the idea that consumers may feel better about investing their money in something that represents their own values (Harrison & Wicks, 2013, p. 107). Furthermore, ecotourists can in turn also be divided into subgroups of different needs, expenditure and environmentally friendly behaviour (cf. Moeller et al., 2011, p. 166-167; Sharpley, 2006, p. 14).

The tourism companies and their employees are also clear stakeholders in the entire ecotourism equation. As previously discussed, tourism organisations must be economically viable in order for them to afford the luxury of implementing voluntary initiatives looked upon as responsible by their external stakeholders (McKercher, 1993, p. 10; Moeller et al., 2011, p. 156). Still, they have an incentive to protect the product they are utilising in order to ensure their organisation’s going concern. Being dependent on the state of the environment and community they exist in, they should have a clear interest in ensuring the quality of their immediate surroundings (cf. Gamage & Boyle, 2008, p. 50; Holden, 2008, p. 215; Moeller et al., 2011, p. 156; Pogge, 2005, p. 6). Similarly, the employees should have equal interests in securing their employers success, as the companies create sought after employment opportunities (Lai & Nepal, 2006, p. 1117-1118). The companies should also acknowledge that their employees are important, especially the guides as they are the ones who face the customers and have a major influence on how the issues of sustainability are conveyed (cf. Powell & Ham, 2008, p. 478; Kontogeorgopoulos & Chulikavit, 2010, p. 628-629).

Last but not least is the stakeholder that is made up by the environment. The local state of the environment is dependent, or maybe challenged, by the behaviour of the companies, communities and tourists that utilise its resources for business, every-day or recreational activities (cf. Holden, 2003, p. 97). In order for the natural flora and fauna to function properly, it must be treated with respect and precaution (Holden, 2003, p. 100). The nature of local ecosystems may be fragile to external impact and climate changes caused by reckless human interventions (cf. Bansal, 2002, p. 123; Barbier, 2011, p. 234). Rather than the early opinion that nature was to be “treated as a ‘free’
good” (Cater, 1995, p. 27), it is instead important to understand the stake the environment has in combination with other stakeholders when it comes to developing a sustainable and well-functioning ecotourism industry (Holden, 2003, p. 95; Starik, 1994, p. 94). This is especially true since the environment cannot speak for itself, it will not protest loudly if treated unjustly although the consequences are possible to observe through alterations to ecosystems and biodiversity (Gritzner, 2002, p. 178).

It is difficult to reconcile the present and future needs of the different stakeholder groups, something that is especially apparent in developing country tourism destinations (Cater, 1995, p. 23). Nevertheless, the prerequisite of sustainable development is to allow all generations, both present and future, fulfil their needs (WCED, 1987, ch. 2, para 1). According to Anand and Sen (2000, p. 2030), it is a wrongful action to constrict the need fulfilment of the future because of selfish present behaviour. As Cater (1995, p. 25) discuss, “short-term benefits to one interest result in long-term losses for others”. Instead, in order to contribute to sustainability, ecotourism companies have to consider and balance the accommodation of both inter- and intragenerational needs (cf. Anand & Sen, 2000, p. 2038; Kaufman, 2009, p. 389).

3.5.3 Mapping it down

By recognising the importance of diverse tourism-related issues to different stakeholders, tourism-related management decisions relevant to the stakeholders can be made (Bruyere et al., 2009, p. 55; Hardy & Beeton, 2001, p. 169, 174). However, despite the importance of taking every stakeholder’s needs and preferences into account, this may prove to be a complicated process. The bottom line is that these stakeholder requirements may be of conflicting nature, making it hard, if not impossible, to address all stakeholder interests at once (Jamal & Stronza, 2009, p. 172; Utting, 2000, p. 5). Although it may be hard to live up to all expectations of different stakeholders, the idea aligns with the notion of the triple bottom line as both are aimed at addressing and integrating seemingly diverse and sometimes indefinable issues and interests (Harrison & Wicks, 2013, p. 110-111; Filho, 2000, p. 9-10, 15-16).

According to Hardy and Beeton (2001, p. 168), it is still important to involve “the needs and requirements of all stakeholders” in order for tourism to have a chance to promote sustainability. It is therefore important that each ecotourism company has a clear view of who their stakeholders are, as this will allow the companies to optimise their approach accordingly (Hardy & Beeton, 2001, p. 171, 174). However, it can still be difficult to pinpoint what specific needs should be given preference over others (Jamal & Stronza, 2009, p. 172; Utting, 2000, p. 5). Nevertheless, it is important that a company engages in stakeholder analysis in order to recognise the parties that have a stake in a company and how its business activities influences each stakeholder (Goodpaster, 1991, p. 56). After all relevant stakeholder groups have been identified, it is important to keep the interest of all stakeholders in mind, something that may require trading off some individual benefits in order to maximise overall corporate and stakeholder benefits (Goodpaster, 1991, p. 57-58, 61-62). As Cater (1995, p. 23) argue: “conflicts will occur between the different interests involved over time and space, and trade-offs will be necessary in order to arrive at the most sustainable course of action”.
3.6 Final remarks

In the above theoretical framework, a number of main themes have been examined in the main areas of ecotourism and sustainable development. These theoretical areas mostly concern stakeholders and economic, social and environmental concerns, as the foundation for identifying potential trade-offs between the pillars of sustainable development in an ecotourism context. From here on, these themes of interest will continuously be of importance in this study as they will serve as tools to understand what trade-offs that may occur in the context that will be examined, i.e. among ecotourism tour operators in Costa Rica. For more specific information on how the chosen theoretical areas will be of significance in this study, please see section 5.8.1 Interview themes: office employees and 5.8.2 Interview themes: guides.
4. Ecotourism in Costa Rica

This chapter will introduce the Costa Rican context in which the data collection takes place, before presenting the research strategy in chapter 5. The country’s natural assets, socio-economic and political structures, its ecotourism industry, and its certification for sustainable tourism will be introduced.

4.1 Introducing Costa Rica

4.1.1 Nature

Costa Rica is a relatively small country situated in Central America, comparable with Denmark in terms of landmass (Swedish Institute of International Affairs, UI, 2013). Despite its limited size, constituting 0.03 per cent of the world’s total surface, the country represents five per cent of the existing biodiversity on the planet (ICT, 2013a; Honey, 2003, p. 40). The country is thereby referred to as a biological superpower (Umana, interviewed in Honey, 2003, p. 40) and its biodiversity is unique in comparison to any other country in the world (Anywhere Costa Rica, 2013; Lonelyplanet, 2013). Costa Rica has several mountain ranges, coastlines towards the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, and five active volcanoes (ICT 2013b; UI, 2013).

The wildlife of Costa Rica is extraordinary, inhabiting more birds than the continent of North America and notably more butterfly species than Africa (Honey, 2003, p. 40). In addition, Costa Rica’s beaches are popular nesting sites for marine turtles (Murillo, 2013). A variety of other species, e.g. amphibians, monkeys and snakes, are indigenous to Costa Rica (Imagenes Tropicales, 2013). Costa Rica’s flora and fauna differentiates the country from other nations, fulfilling the natural requirements needed for the creation of a successful ecotourism industry (e.g. Honey, 2003, p. 40). Thus, Costa Rica’s biodiversity is the country’s main attraction (e.g. Hall, 2006, p. 214). We would therefore argue that Costa Rica is an eligible country to study in the ecotourism context.

4.1.2 Socio-economic and political structures

As a long term strategy, the Costa Rican government, through the nation’s National System of Conservation Areas (SINAC), has engaged in extensive nature protection actions, more specifically, 26 per cent of Costa Rica’s land area has been turned into national parks (ICT, 2013c). Additionally, the Costa Rican government has stated that the country is striving to become the world’s first carbon-neutral nation, which is further emphasising the nation’s sustainability ambitions (Long, 2011, p. 23).

Costa Rica is a middle-income developing nation (WBI, 2013). Therefore, although the country has made developmental improvements, it may still face challenges of sustained
4.1.3 The development of Ecotourism

As mentioned, Costa Rica is highly dependent on tourism (ICT, 2012), which has been the case since the 1990s when tourism surpassed agriculture as the country’s primary source of income (UI, 2013). Currently, about 65 per cent of the Ticos are working in the service sector, almost one third of them in the tourism industry (UI, 2013). Since the late 80s, Costa Rica has been recognised as a country working with sustainable tourism (Honey, 2003, p. 39). One reason why the sustainable tourism industry is successful is that the country fulfils the basic preconditions of the industry, having an extraordinary bio-diversity and political stability (Honey, 2003, p. 40; UI, 2013).

While ecotourism in Costa Rica has developed partly as a cause of the country’s natural characteristics, it has also succeeded as a result of a conscious conservation and development strategy (Stem et al., 2003a, p. 388; Stem et al., 2003b, p. 322; Koen et al., 2009, p. 1225-1226). Furthermore, the ecotourism activities in Costa Rica are often customised to a specific region as a natural way of embracing the local biodiversity. For instance, it is common to explore volcanoes in the northern lowlands while turtle spotting is more popular at the Caribbean coast (Costa Rica Guides, 2013a; 2013b). As such, Costa Rica is one of the most well-known ecotourism destinations in the world (Earth Island Journal, 2006, p. 16; Honey, 2003, p. 39). Additionally, it has been rewarded as one of the ten best ethical destinations (Ethical Traveler, 2013).

4.2 Certification for Sustainable Tourism

As a consequence of ecotourism’s rapid development and success, some promote their companies as more sustainable than they truly are (Honey, 2003, p. 43). The Costa Rican Tourism Board has initiated a Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST), distinguishing greenwashing companies from organisations working towards a sustainable purpose (CST, 2013a; 2013b). The CST categorises tourism operators into different groups depending on their achievements within natural, cultural and social management of resources (CST, 2013a). In the context of the ecotourism tour operating sector, CST (2013b) describes sustainability as a balance between the proper use of natural and cultural resources, improving life quality of local communities, and last but not least, economic success, supporting supplementary development programs all over Costa Rica. CST is designed in a five-step scale for sustainable tourism achievements, currently assigned to 61 tour operators in Costa Rica (CST, 2013a; 2013c). Tour operators are asked 108 evaluative questions connected to sustainability (CST, 2013d), and after further investigation, the companies are ascribed their level of certification; a number between 0-5 where one and higher is considered as an approval (CST, 2013e).
5. Research strategy

This chapter aims to explain the research strategy of this thesis. The data collection will be explained followed by interview sample criteria. The interview respondents will be presented and a non-responsive analysis will be conducted. Furthermore, the interview guides and themes will be introduced. Finally, interview limitations and data processing will be briefly discussed in this chapter. Ethical considerations are included continuously when they arise.

5.1 Approach

This thesis will examine how ecotourism tour operators in Costa Rica handle the three dimensions of sustainable development. As discussed previously, Costa Rica is a middle-income developing nation. Although the case of Costa Rica is contextual, the study will be an example of ecotourism tour operators operating in developing countries. We believe that a case method approach is suitable, as it will allow us to see the multiple “perspectives which are rooted in a specific context” by collecting data from people and organisations with different or similar perspectives on the issues we are investigating (cf. Lewis, 2003, p. 52). Similarly, a case study will support the analysis process of the structure “within which the study is conducted and which the case illuminates and explicates” (Thomas, 2011, p. 23). As such, a case study provides a nuanced and possibly multifaceted view on how reality is to be understood (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 223). Case studies can be seen as too narrow to produce significant evidences of specific issues (cf. Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 220ff.). However, as Eysenck (1976, p. 9) pointed out “sometimes we simply have to keep our eyes open and look carefully at individual cases – not in the hope of proving anything, but rather in the hope of learning something”. Furthermore, when issues investigated are somewhat related to the realm of social science, it is hard not to produce data that is context-specific, justifying the decision to use a case based approach (cf. Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 223).

As earlier mentioned, we have decided to investigate the case of tour operators within the ecotourism industry, thus excluding other organisations and businesses that work with ecotourism related business activities. In other words, our study will exclude hotels, car rental services, transportation services, restaurants etc. whose main business is not concerned with tour arrangements and intermediation. A variety of different actors affect the industry and the possibility for ecotourism activities and businesses to contribute to sustainable development. However, we believe it is well suited to limit the essay towards tour operators as they have a chance to influence both local stakeholders and the travellers that choose to buy the services they provide. Nevertheless, we are aware that the tour operators themselves do not influence the entire industry alone, thus excluding input that may be valuable for the understanding of the sustainability debate that has concerned the ecotourism industry.
The issues we are addressing will be researched within the context of local Costa Rican ecotourism tour operators. Although all companies in the sample will operate in Costa Rica, there may be issues like the tours they are offering, what customers they have, in what region they focus on, and the level of certification that they have been awarded with that may influence how they affect and perceive their impact on the economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development. It is therefore our opinion that the issues of ecotourism and sustainable development may be context specific. The findings must be seen as what they are, representatives of specific cases and not the general truth. This does however not reject the fact that the conclusions may be insightful to companies, communities and public institutions external to our study.

5.2 Data collection

The aim of this study is to investigate how ecotourism tour operators handle the economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development. In doing this, we will shed light on the individual’s subjective perception of ecotourism and sustainable development. Although the respondents represent different ecotourism tour operators, we believe that it is important how the individuals perceive the reality in which communities and organisations give reason to the issues we aim to investigate. In order to understand and analyse the reasoning of the individual contributors, we will use an interpretative approach. Our objective is not to quantify the individuals’ perceptions of ecotourism and sustainable development within the scope of our research; we rather wish to discern communalities and/or conflicting opinions in the answers of the respondents and the organisations they represent.

Given these preconditions, we have chosen a qualitative study approach, something that is highly associated with our case study method (cf. Lewis, 2002, p. 51). Qualitative research focus on studying individuals in their “natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). In other words, this approach may serve to enable pattern discernment between different respondents, creating an understanding of the issues researched (Hartman, 2004, p. 272-274; Ritchie, 2003, p. 36; Trost, 2010, p. 32).

The qualitative approach will allow us to collect the subjective understanding and perception of the respondents who will participate in the study. To be able to access the individuals’ perceptions and interpretations, we will conduct a number of in-depth interviews, one of the key types of qualitatively generated data (Lewis, 2003, p. 57). This data collection choice is relevant to our case study approach, as the objective of a case study is to reach in-depth understanding (Lewis, 2003, p. 52). As Lewis (2003, p. 60) argues, in-depth interviews are appropriate when the objective is to examine issues in detail, and to understand the context of complex situations and the motivation, decision, impact and outcomes of specific processes.

5.3 Company sample criteria

With the use of this method, we will examine how tour operators handle the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development within a developing country context, in order to reveal how their handling may result in trade-offs. We have an aim to investigate local organisations and how they contribute to this debate, rather than focusing on large transnational corporations where there is less certainty that the
financial means that are used to contribute to sustainable development are kept within Costa Rica’s national frontiers. We will use a purposive sampling method, choosing sample units with characteristics that will enable us to understand the essentials of the specific issues of ecotourism and sustainable development. This as the average case according to Flyvbjerg (2006, p. 229-230) “is often not the richest in information” regarding the issues at stake compared to cases using information-oriented sample selection. In other words, we will select our respondents purposively, as we believe they are representative of, and relevant to, the issues we wish to interpret (cf. Ritchie et al., 2003, p. 78-79, 82). We have therefore decided to encircle our sample by a number of prescribed selection criteria.

**Criterion 1: Certification for Sustainable Tourism**

One of the thesis’ main objectives is to generate an understanding of how tour operators may contribute to the creation of potential trade-offs between the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development. It is in other words important that we can make sure that the organisations we propose to include in our data generation are classified as companies contributing to the sustainable resource management and development. We will therefore only include companies that have the CST stamp of approval; companies that have been externally audited to ensure to what level of certification these organisations are committed to sustainable tourism. Although we may exclude companies that are good examples of ecotourism and enablers of sustainable development because they have not yet been certified, it ensures that the companies we actually chose are certified representatives of the ecotourism industry.

**Criterion 2: Tours as the main business**

As discussed in Chapter 1, this thesis is aimed at investigating tour operators. However, CST does not only certify pure tour operators as the certificate for tour operators include companies who to a high extent also work as hotel and accommodation brokers, transportation and car-rental businesses and companies combining tour broking with other ecotourism related activities. Therefore, we will only include ecotourism companies whose main business is to arrange ecotourism tours. Even though we believe that other businesses, except pure tour operators, have the possibility to contribute to sustainable development, we argue that the actual tours are the most nature related activities of the tourism industry, capturing the environmental essence of ecotourism.

**Criterion 3: Costa Rican company**

To ensure that the financial means derived from ecotourism tours are kept within the nation of Costa Rica to promote the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, we wish to only include companies that are strongly anchored to Costa Rica. Therefore, it should be expressed on the companies’ webpages that the organisations are owned, at least to a high degree, by Costa Ricans and not by multinational corporations. Furthermore, the tours should be mainly provided in Costa Rica. As this study will explore the case of Costa Rica, multinational companies are not representative of the case per se. Although this criterion may exclude companies that are in a position to influence the Costa Rican ecotourism industry, we believe that it is crucial that the companies included are considered as Costa Rican as they are the ones highly experiencing the effects of ecotourism and sustainable development in the context of Costa Rica. Also, we believe that Costa Rican companies are most dependent on the state of their country’s economic, social and environmental situation in comparison to e.g. multinational corporations.
With these sample selection criteria in mind, 46 companies are qualified to participate in our study. The tour operators we will contact vary from level 1 to level 5, representing the entire spectrum of certification levels of approval. Although the tour operators that fulfill our sample criteria are mainly located in close proximity to the San José area, they do vary in the specific tours they promote and market to their customers. Some offer more adventurous activities, while others focus on hiking tours or Costa Rica’s biodiversity. All companies that we will approach are Costa Rican in our definition in connection to Criterion 3, ensuring that no income is transferred directly to an external nation. Although we have chosen to make a purposive sample that will allow us to answer questions that are of specific interest to our thesis, we do believe that we have a sample that is varied enough to enable multifaceted data generation. As Ritchie et al. (2003, p. 83) argue, it is important that “the sample is as diverse as possible within the boundaries of the defined population” to make sure that different inputs and elements are enabled as far as possible.

5.4 Respondent sample criteria

As when sampling companies qualified to participate in our research, we have also decided to set criteria for the individual respondents. These criteria will serve as a mean to secure that we will get in contact with someone that have the ability to answer our questions accurately.

Criterion 1: English speaking (administrative personnel and tour guides)

In order to decrease the risk of language difficulties during the interviews, this criterion concerns that the interviewee need to be English speaking as we as researchers are not fluent in Spanish. With this criterion, our intention is that the respondents should be able to relatively freely express themselves during the interview and also be fairly comfortable with speaking English in an interview situation.

Criterion 2: Company sustainability awareness (administrative personnel)

In order to secure that the interviewee has the knowledge needed to answer our questions, it is important that the representative is familiar with the company in general and especially its procedures concerning sustainable development.

On the basis of these criteria, we asked each company to select representatives suitable to participate in our research. Every company provided us with one respondent representing the administrative personnel and some organisations also had the opportunity to get us in contact with a tour guide.

5.5 Interview respondents and companies

As described earlier, we are going to interview representatives from tour operator operators in Costa Rica. From the 46 companies fulfilling our sample criteria, seven expressed an interest in participating in our research. Out of these seven companies, nine respondents will be included in our investigation. A non-response analysis will be presented in section 5.6 Non-response analysis. The companies are different in terms of their head office locations, four of them operating mainly from the San José area while one company has its main business in Quepos and two companies have their main offices in La Fortuna. However, many of these companies are not only operating in the area where their offices are located, but as we have mentioned also in other areas nearby
and some of them more or less all over Costa Rica. For an illustration of the geographical spread and the certification levels the participating companies illustrate, see Table 3 below. A more detailed introduction to the companies and the tours they are offering is described in section 6.1 Costa Rican ecotourism operators. Furthermore, a complete table of the respondents that participated in this study and information on the interviews is found in Appendix IV Interview respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>Company</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angel Bamavedes</td>
<td>Tour guide</td>
<td>Jacamar Naturalist Tours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cordero</td>
<td>Sales rep. office department.</td>
<td>Jacamar Naturalist Tours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cruz</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>ACTUAR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamboa Cespedes</td>
<td>In charge of sustainability</td>
<td>Wave Expeditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manavella</td>
<td>Sustainability manager, tour guide</td>
<td>Swiss Travel Costa Rica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martinez</td>
<td>Marketing manager</td>
<td>Iguana Tours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pichardo</td>
<td>Tour guide</td>
<td>Wave Expeditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vargas Rodriguez</td>
<td>Sustainability department, manager assistant</td>
<td>Costa Rican Trails</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zúñiga</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Il Viaggio Travel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 Interview respondents and companies

5.6 Non-response analysis

Among the contacted companies eligible to contribute to our data collection process, many organisations did not reply to our interview requests. The reason for this may be that the time we were able to conduct our interviews in Costa Rica were during the high season or the beginning of the rainy season, meaning that a lot of the companies may have been unable to help us due to their heavy workload. The same may reflect the difficulty we had in talking to tour guides from all the companies we were interviewing. We only got the chance to do three interviews and one complimentary e-mail interview with questions to guides working within the companies. The main reason for the limited guide availability was primarily that the guides worked long hours during the time we were present and were unable to sit down and talk with us. We did have one more guide interview scheduled, unfortunately the respondent was ill at the time, and we did not get the chance to reschedule the appointment. One of the guide representatives also worked in business administration. Therefore, in total we got the chance to speak to nine individuals, both representing administrative and office staff, and tour guides.

If more companies had participated in our study, it would increase the generalisability of the results. However, even if it was not a sample criterion, we did unfortunately not get the chance to speak to companies from all different certification levels as no level 1 organisation agreed to meet with us. Neither did we interview representatives from all regions of Costa Rica, although some of the organisations of our study provide countrywide tours. This implies that our findings will not be representative of all companies of different certification level, neither will it represent all companies that work with ecotourism tours in different regions. However, our objective is to show the reality of the ecotourism tour operators of our study, not to present findings that are unanimous to all tour operators independent of their origin and level. In other words, we wish to present findings that people can learn from, not findings that are universally generalisable. However, we do acknowledge that additional company representatives, especially guides, potentially would have made our findings more diverse and insightful.
5.7 Interview procedures

Prior to the interviews, we consulted our contact persons in Costa Rica, Ingemar Hedström, Maria Ruiz and Robert Fletcher, about any cultural aspects of conducting interviews with Costa Ricans. They did not highlight any specific issues of formalities, hierarchies, difficulties in interpreting gestures or gender barriers, only that we should be polite, professional and open-minded. Therefore, we mainly prepared for the interviews by getting well acquainted with the issues of ecotourism and sustainable development.

The interviews have been conducted with each respondent separately on an agreed time. Each interviewee has been interviewed individually and in person with one exception being the interview with Wave Expeditions. During that interview, one guide participated for a while and answered complimentary questions via e-mail that we were unable to ask him during the interview. In addition, in the interview with Swiss Travel Costa Rica, Manavella answered both questions aimed at guides and management employees due to his experience from both professions. Individual interviews are suitable when investigating detailed issues in order to gain an “understanding of the personal context within which the research phenomena are located” (Ritchie, 2003, p. 36). The reason why we almost exclusively decided to conduct our interviews through personal encounters is that we think that it would allow us to more fully interpret the scope of the answers and how the interviewees answered the questions. This allowed us to reflect upon the spoken word, body language and gestures of the respondents, something that would have been impossible without us meeting them.

Each interview was conducted at a location chosen by the respondents themselves. Most interviews took place at the offices of the tour operators, while two of them were carried out in the interviewees’ cars. We allowed the respondents to choose the location in order for them to feel most at rest to answer the questions we were asking rather than having them come to a location of our choice outside their comfort zone, something that also may have restricted the time they had available for us. Although we requested to speak to each office employee for at least an hour and the guides 30 minutes as the questions for the guides were less comprehensive, the respondents got the chance to decide how much time they had available for us. This resulted in that the interviews varied between 30 minutes to 2 hours and 20 minutes. The two longest interviews were combined guide and management employee interviews.

We did not test our interview guide prior to the interviews were conducted on location. This was mostly due to the fact that our interview guide was constructed in different themes rather than in different complete questions. For the same reason, we did not send our interview guide to the respondents and neither did they request to see any of our questions in advance. Depending on the time each interviewee had available for us, we adapted the questions asked in order to still cover all relevant themes. Each respondent also agreed to answer more questions via e-mail in case we felt that there was something that needed clarification. However, after conducting all interviews and having asked the follow-up questions to the guide from Wave Expeditions, we felt that we had covered all themes in a satisfactory way, getting answers that would serve as a foundation for the issues we wish to analyse and discuss in relation to our research question and the overall objective of the thesis.
Both of us asked questions during the interviews, alternating between the different themes and topics of our interview guide. We decided not to assign specific questions to either one of us prior to the interviews and both of us were able to ask the follow-up questions we felt were suited to the different scenarios. The interviewees were informed that they had no obligation to answer all questions asked. All interviews were conducted in English and recorded with the permission of each interviewee. As informed to the respondents, the recordings were transcribed in close connection to each meeting, allowing us to capture all details of each interview. The recordings and transcriptions have not been accessed by anyone but us, neither is the data intended for any other use outside this particular thesis. After introducing the purpose of our thesis and inquiry, and explaining through which forums the result would be made public, each interviewee was given the option to remain anonymous, something they all declined.

5.8 Interview guide design

The interview structure is dependent on the complexity of the issue examined, as it may be difficult for the researchers to formulate definite questions (Arthur & Nazroo, 2003, p. 110). In this study, we will conduct semi-structured interviews, consisting of standardised key themes and question topics, and context dependent follow-up questions that will give depth to the answers (Arthur & Nazroo, 2003, p. 111). The main reason for this approach is that it enables us to control the structure of the interview process, without challenging the in-depth understanding of the case. If unstructured interviews were used, the risk would be higher that the interviews develop in undesirable directions (e.g. Arthur & Nazroo, 2003, p. 111), thus it would be more difficult to compare the gathered information. On the other hand, structured interviews constraints flexibility (Grix, 2001, p. 76). Therefore, semi-structured interviews are suitable as we aim to analyse and understand ecotourism’s potential trade-offs and not identify a definite truth.

The interview guide for office and management employees is divided into nine main themes, namely Introduction, Employees, Customers, Local community, Economic, Social and Environmental aspects, Trade-offs, and Closure. The guide used for the tour guides is similar, but it does not have specific themes for the employees or the local community as they are incorporated in the other themes. Although they are similar, the office employee guide is more elaborate to assess the issues in greater depth. Each theme is divided into different subtopics and details. The guide is not structured; it is rather a guide that will serve as a reminder of the different issues we wish to discuss. The interview guide will therefore help us in covering the aspects we wish to investigate without us being restricted by too strict questions. The interview guides that we used are found in Appendix II and III, one for the office representative and one for the tour guides. The purpose of the different themes is described in detail below.

5.8.1 Interview themes: office employees

Theme 1 – Introduction

After introducing our thesis and its objective, a few introductory questions enable the collection of background information on the tour operators and data on the interviewees’ positions in their respective companies. Apart from asking general questions regarding the companies’ objectives, the theme concludes with questions aimed at highlighting the different stakeholders that the respondents feel are key to the different organisations.
Theme 2-4 – Employees, Customers, and Local community
These themes serve to identify how the employees, customers and local communities are involved or allowed to influence the different ecotourism tour operators. The questions are focused on categorising who these three groups are, where they originate from and what their interests are in the different companies involved in our study. Ultimately, the aim is to determine how the companies reach these stakeholder groups.

Theme 5 – Economic aspects
Being one of the three dimensions of sustainable development, the economic aspect of the tour operators is important to examine. The different topics that are covered by this theme has the objective to identify how the companies may contribute to economic growth and how it turn affects the company, the society and the local community. Besides investigating the economic benefits and setbacks, the detail questions will also serve to detect weather the companies experience any issues of economic leakage.

Theme 6 – Social aspects
The social aspects are also important and the objective of this theme is to encircle how the operators work to promote the social dimension of sustainable development, mainly how the local community is influenced by the tours and the tourists that come to the different destinations. It is also focused on issues related to culture and education.

Theme 7 – Environmental aspects
The environmental aspects are aimed at detecting the environmental benefits and setbacks that the tour operators’ experience. The theme is designed to highlight the tours’ influence on the environment. Ultimately, the questions are aimed at concluding what effect the environmental impact has on the companies and their tours, the society and local community, highlight each company’s sustainability responsibility.

Theme 8 – Trade-offs
Concluding the rationale of the different dimensions of sustainable development is a section that relates more specifically to the potential trade-offs the tour operators are contributing to, either actively or unconsciously. The theme and its subtopics are aimed at the possible difficulty of combining all the different aspects, their importance, and if and how the companies may have to prioritise between the three dimensions.

Theme 9 – Closure
The final theme concerns the concluding remarks that either the interviewees or we have, also investigating the main concern of the tour operators’ reinvestments and how important or irrelevant it is to either plan ahead or act now in order to maximise the good outcome of the ecotourism industry. Finally, there is room for us to show our gratitude to the respondents and to ask them questions on confidentiality and anonymity.

5.8.2 Interview themes: guides

Theme 1 – Introduction
The first theme is focused on introducing the interviewee and his or her responsibilities. As a start, the discussion will mainly regard the guide’s career choice and previous experience within the tourism or other industries. The theme will also serve to investigate the guide’s possibility to influence the company.
Theme 2 – Customers
After discussing the responsibilities of the guide, this theme is designed to highlight the interests the tourists show in the information given and sustainability based on experience from the actual tours.

Theme 3 – Economic aspects
Working in ecotourism, the guides may possibly be influenced by the industry’s seasonality. This theme will therefore focus on investigating the need to take on extra work and the guides’ work/life-balance. The theme will also serve to highlight how each guide experience the economic effect of ecotourism.

Theme 4 – Social aspects
Again, the objective of this theme is to investigate the work/life-balance of the tour guides. Educational aspects and information on how the knowledge of the guides may be transferred to their family and friends are identified. In addition the attitude of and the impact on the local community is examined, including the attitudes of other guides.

Theme 5 – Environmental aspects
Similar to the social aspects, the idea of knowledge transferring is discussed, but more in relation to the environment. Compared to the environmental aspects discussed with the office employees, this theme is designed to highlight the impact of the actual tours.

Theme 6 – Trade-offs
The theme will serve to highlight the difficulties and importance of the different dimensions of sustainable development through the perspective of the guides. Possible conflicts of the different aspects are included, as well as the priorities given to them.

Theme 7 – Closure
The final theme is constructed to highlight the time perspective, if ecotourism is a long- or short-term initiative. To end the interview, concluding remarks and confidentiality issues are mentioned before finalising the discussion with us expressing our appreciation of respondents’ contributions.

5.9 Interview limitations
At the beginning of each interview we described the purpose of our inquiry and why each company and respondent would provide us with relevant information to fulfil that purpose. Using our theoretical framework, we asked questions with support from the semi-structured interview guides. As noted previously, the companies themselves chose the respondents. Therefore, there is a risk that the companies referred us to respondents giving us biased portrayals of their operations. However, the answers we got felt honest, none of the respondents seemed to beautify their contributions or disregard their challenges. In addition, the questions asked where aimed at examining the case of Costa Rican ecotourism, and not the individual tour operators. Therefore, it is in our opinion beneficial that the companies choose representatives well acquainted with the issues examined.

Before we executed the interviews, some respondents made us aware that they had limited time available to answer our questions. As we have mentioned before, we do still feel that we got relevant information out of the interviews that were performed.
under more time restriction than the others. As a result of the time constraints of some of the interviews, the respondents may have felt stressed, something that may have affected the way in which they answered our questions. However, during the interviews, none of the respondents interrupted us and we got the time to ask all the questions we needed. The only effect of the time constraint was that some of the answers were less elaborate when the time of the interview respondent was limited.

As previously noted, all our interviews were recorded with the consent from each interviewee. Some of the respondents may have been unused to being recorded, something that may have affected them. However, all respondents did in our opinion speak openly and did not show any signs of discomfort of the actual recording process. One aspect that has to be taken into consideration when assessing our methodological choice is the potential language barrier. English is not the first language of our respondents, as all interviewees were native Spanish-speaking Costa Ricans. However, they all knew and mastered the English language in a way that enabled us to carry out the interviews in English. If we experienced that the interviewees had not fully understood the questions, we clarified what we were asking for in order for them to fully understand the scope of our questions. Also, if we did not understand the answers we got, we asked the respondents to repeat or clarify their answers. Although we felt that they all answered the questions in relevant and insightful ways, the interviewees may have been more comfortable in answering the questions in their mother tongue, something that may have given us even more substantial and detailed answers.

The different interviewees were both female and male, and as noted, they were representing both tour guides and office employees from seven different ecotourism tour operators. Although the sex of the respondents is of no relevance to the issues we are studying, their different positions may influence how they answer the different questions we were asking. Some of the office employees had management positions on the companies; some had more assisting roles, while one of our respondents was the actual owner the company in question. The tour guides also differ in the sense that one worked as a tour guide occasionally, being a sustainability manager permanently, while the other guides only worked with guided trips. The result from this may be that the information gained from each interview will not be comparable. Nevertheless, all the respondents that we talked to had detailed answers to our questions and it appeared as if they were well acquainted with the issues brought up to discussion. In addition, our ambition is not to produce a solution to the issues experienced within the ecotourism industry, neither should the conclusions we present be seen as the general truth. However, we did experience that the different respondents gave similar answers to a lot of our questions. This indicates that there are commonalities that represent the opinion of the entire sample, although the nature of our sample constraints further generalisation.

Another feature that may have impacted our interviews is that we interviewed people who have the opportunity to influence the businesses they are working in, giving them both authority and legitimacy. In some countries, being two women interviewers could have a large impact on the answers revealed, since there may be significant hierarchy issues present. However, in Costa Rica it is not uncommon with women in management positions, partly illustrated by two of the interviewees being women. We neither experienced any advantages nor disadvantages by being women and conducting the interviews. In our eyes, all of the respondents were very attentive to our questions and we do not believe that our gender or roles limited the information they shared with us.
One final aspect to take into consideration when assessing the process of and the information gained from the interviews is that we outnumbered the respondents in every occasion except the one with Wave expeditions. However, we do consider that the interviewees had the practical information advantage of the issues we were discussing. Therefore, we being two did not have any noticeable effect on the interviewees. During the interview with Wave expeditions, the office employee answered most questions, but neither of the two seemed to be inhibited by our or the other respondent’s presence.

5.10 Data processing

The data will be categorised into focus areas in a decoding process. These areas will be constructed with the theoretical framework in mind, enabling a clear connection between theory and empirical data. The categories used to decode the transcripts are found in Appendix V-IX, making the result presentation more schematic and cohesive. As the forthcoming chapter will show, we will alternate between presenting and analysing the data, avoiding unnecessary repetitions, making the empirical data easier to digest. Although Nylén (2005, p. 16-17) argues it may be relevant to separate the empirical description from the analysis, the empirical presentation is strongly correlated to both preceding and subsequent sections (Nylén, 2005, p. 16). We aim to gain insight on the theoretical ideas of the thesis, integrating the theoretical framework in the review of our empirical material. Therefore, it is suitable to continuously combine the empirical description with the analysis (cf. Glaser, 1965, p. 437).
6. Empirical findings and analysis

The purpose of this chapter is to present the empirical findings of this study in the main areas of ecotourism and sustainable development. Common denominators and potential contradictions between theory and the information that has been revealed during the interviews will be exemplified. Continuously, the data will be analysed to form the basis for the conclusions.

6.1 Costa Rican ecotourism tour operators

Below, Table 4 is presenting basic information from the interviews concerning the companies that have participated in our research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Founded</th>
<th>Main activities</th>
<th>CST level</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Customers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACTUAR, Escazú</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Community based rural tourism</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14*</td>
<td>Europe (mostly France, Germany and Spain), USA and Costa Ricans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rican Trails, San Pedro</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Combinational tour offerings</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35*</td>
<td>Europe, USA and Latin America.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iguana Tours, Quepos</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Canal tours, nature walks, boat trips, snorkelling, horse-riding etc.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15*</td>
<td>USA (65 %), Europe (25 %), Canada (5-7 %), few from Latin America.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il Viaggio Travel, Escazú</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Tailored tour programs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4*</td>
<td>North America (50 %), Europe (40 %) and Latin America (10 %).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacamar Naturalist Tours, La Fortuna</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Nature based tours; hiking, bird watching etc.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50*</td>
<td>Mostly USA and Canada, but also Europe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swiss Travel Costa Rica, Santa Ana</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Big scale customised tour offerings</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>321*</td>
<td>USA (90 %) and Europe (10 %).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave Expeditions, La Fortuna</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Adventure activities in water; rafting etc.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40*</td>
<td>USA and Europe (mostly Spain).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Excluding freelancers

Table 4 Participating companies

We have interviewed one office employee in each company, and in some of the organisations we have also interviewed a tour guide representative. Again, for more
information on the interviewees, see Appendix IV. From now on, the interviewees will be referred to by their last name(s), as shown in Table 5 below, a repetition of Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>Company</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angel Bamavedes</td>
<td>Tour guide</td>
<td>Jacamar Naturalist Tours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cordero</td>
<td>Sales rep. office department.</td>
<td>Jacamar Naturalist Tours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cruz</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>ACTUAR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamboa Cespedes</td>
<td>In charge of sustainability</td>
<td>Wave Expeditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manavella</td>
<td>Sustainability manager, tour guide</td>
<td>Swiss Travel Costa Rica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martinez</td>
<td>Marketing manager</td>
<td>Iguana Tours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pichardo</td>
<td>Tour guide</td>
<td>Wave Expeditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vargas Rodriguez</td>
<td>Sustainability department, manager assistant</td>
<td>Costa Rican Trails</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zúñiga</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Il Viaggio Travel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 Interview respondents and companies (Table 3 rep.)

6.1.1 ACTUAR

ACTUAR is a community based rural tourism network, formed by 17 different communities consisting of farmers, conservationists and indigenous populations, aimed at creating sustainable livelihoods for the communities (Cruz). According to Cruz, ACTUAR’s purpose is to “promote sustainability; economic, social and environmental sustainability in the community based rural tourism associations that belong to ACTUAR”. ACTUAR offer unconventional tours all over Costa Rica, sometimes in combination with more traditional tours including the typical highlights of Costa Rica (Cruz). Cruz explained that the communities are the owners of ACTUAR, and the money earned from the tours is reinvested in these communities as a mean to build capacity. Thus, this organisation is categorised as non-profit.

6.1.2 Costa Rican Trails

This company is a traditional travel operator working on a for-profit basis (Vargas Rodriguez). The organisation mainly offers tour packages in Costa Rica, also providing some tours in Nicaragua and Panama. According to Vargas Rodriguez, “we [Costa Rican Trails] try to combine the best attractions of Costa Rica including natural resources, cultural resources and try to offer them in a sustainable way”. Costa Rican Trails provides customised and complete tours packages all over Costa Rica, tailoring their tours both internally and with their external partners (Vargas Rodriguez).

6.1.3 Iguana Tours

Iguana tours is a for-profit tour operator providing tours mostly in Manuel Antonio but also in Carara and Corcovado (Martinez). Martinez explained that the purpose of the organisation is to transfer the original owner’s way of living into today’s practices, meaning to work with “the same ideas of responsibility for the community and the environment and to make a living for the families [in these communities]”. This company offers numerous tours, including canal tours, nature walks, boat trips, snorkelling and horseback riding (Martinez). Iguana Tours do not subcontract; it has its own staff, horses, and boats etc. that are needed for their business operations (Martinez). During high season, freelancing guides may be employed (Martinez).
6.1.4 Il Viaggio Travel

This company is working for-profit, with the purpose to "satisfy all the travel needs of people coming to Costa Rica in a sustainable way, when possible" (Zúñiga). Il Viaggio Travel tries to encourage tourists to choose sustainable alternatives whether it comes to lodging, supporting projects or something else (Zúñiga). The main product is complete tour packages, including everything from pick-up in the airport to tours all over Costa Rica and lodging (Zúñiga). As Zúñiga puts it, "I would say that most of our services is about putting all the pieces together [...]". The company almost exclusively outsource its services, e.g. tour guiding and transportation, to support local entrepreneurs instead of buying their own facilities and equipment.

6.1.5 Jacamar Naturalist Tours

Jacamar Naturalist Tours is a for-profit company providing tours in the areas of La Fortuna and Guanacaste (Cordero). The company is specialised in nature-based tours, including bird watching, hikes, and some more adventurous activities through other tour providers. The tours include visits to different national parks, especially in the area of Rincón de la Vieja and Palo Verde (Cordero). Cordero states that Jacamar’s purpose is to "be part of vacations of people coming to Costa Rica and especially the ones who are looking more for nature" and to "satisfy all the demands from these people, and especially in the nature areas".

6.1.6 Swiss Travel Costa Rica

Swiss Travel Costa Rica is one of the oldest tour operators in the country with its 42 years in business, and it is also one of the largest (Manavella). Originally, the company was 100 per cent Swiss owned but nowadays it is owned to 75 per cent by Costa Ricans (Manavella). The company mission is "to be the leading tour operator in Costa Rica and to excel the expectations of our guests" (Manavella). Swiss travel works on a demand basis and customise its tour offerings depending on what the clients wish to experience (Manavella). Manavella specified that the tours often include adventure, luxury, spa and beach activities and the company operates tours all over the country. Swiss Travel has the capacity of handling large numbers of clients and owns most of its assets, including buses and cruise ships (Manavella). The company is categorised a for-profit organisation.

6.1.7 Wave expeditions

This organisation is for-profit and specialises in water adventure activities like rafting (Gamboa Cespedes). However, the purpose of Wave Expeditions is not only to offer adventure tours, but also collaborating with local companies for the benefit and develop prospects of the local communities (Gamboa Cespedes). Gamboa Cespedes explains that it works like this; "When we are rafting, we make a stop in the middle of the trip, where they sell fruits and snacks, so we are not only thinking of us, but also in other small companies in the area". Most of the tours are offered in the La Fortuna area, but the company is also providing tours all over Costa Rica, working as a tour operator and combining tours for specific customer requests (Gamboa Cespedes).
6.2 Economic concerns

When it comes to the economic dimension of sustainable development, the interviewees mainly addressed economic growth, economic leakage, tourists’ effects on local communities and last but not least, ongoing economic concerns. The information revealed during the interviews has been summarised in Appendix V Economic concerns.

6.2.1 Economic growth

As mentioned previously, although economic growth alone may be insufficient (WCED, 1987, ch. 2, para. 6), it is one of the aspects highly influencing a country’s socio-economic and human development (Ailenei & Mosora, 2011, p. 6; Mukherjee & Kathuria, 2006, p. 39). All the participating companies perceive that they contribute to economic growth in the local society. Martinez expresses that Iguana Tours contribute to economic growth mainly by providing job opportunities. Angel Bamavedes, Cordero and Manavella agree upon their businesses creating jobs, adding that the salary earned by the tour guides are considered as good in the Costa Rican context. According to Manavella, “the paid salary is for example $85 a day, but you can make twice or trice that on tips and commissions, if you are good. [...] For the standards of Costa Rica, it is very good”. Therefore, the tour guides actually have relatively high salaries in the context of Costa Rica, especially if they work hard (Manavella). Thus, it can be financially beneficial to work within the ecotourism industry, although Lebel et al. (2010, p. 224) and Mitchell (2012, p. 458) argue that this is not necessarily the case.

To create many job opportunities, Il Viaggio outsource all their services to local providers (Zúñiga). This implies that more people will share the economic benefits from working in tourism, possibly reducing the economic gap between the rich and the poor (cf. Bretschger & Valente, 2011, p. 832; Guiga & Rejeb, 2012, p. 471, 478; Pogge, 2005, p. 4). However, the economic benefits vary throughout the year, since tour guides earn less during the low season (Angel Bamavedes; Pichardo). According to Angel Bamavedes, “we always know that high season is when we save money to pass the low season”. In addition, the seasonality of the industry may force guides to take on extra work during low seasons (Cruz). This implies that wages may be insufficient due to continuous demand fluctuations and instability (cf. Horton, 2009, p. 98; Slob & Wilde, 2006, p. 22; Weinberg et al., 2002, p. 377). Also, it may be hard for guides to balance everyday life with the fluctuating demands (Angel Bamavedes, Manavella; Pichardo). You are always on stand-by, even in the low season (Angel Bamavedes).

Gamboa Cespedes explains that Wave Expeditions contribute to economic growth by collaborating with local companies, improving the stability of their income. Both Cruz and Vargas Rodriguez also emphasise the importance of helping local communities, providing tools for the communities to generate economic growth by themselves. However, this is not always the case in the tourism sector, as local communities often do not experience the benefits from tourism in a high degree (Issa & Jayawardena, 2003, p. 168). Cruz states that ACTUAR “help them [the communities] to develop their tourism products; this means that we are helping the tools in order to generate economic growth through tourism”. Additionally, ACTUAR donate grants by creating alliances with other corporations and institutions to bring economic resources to the communities (Cruz). However, organisations cannot assume to get any direct financial benefits, as they rather get the social benefits of the society in return (Manavella).
6.2.2 Economic leakage

It is argued that economic leakage is a common issue in the tourism sector (Akama & Kieti, 2007, p. 746; Chon & Maier, 2010, p. 68; Koen et al., 2009, p. 1227; Nelson, 2013, p. 170; Slob & Wilde, 2006, p. 8; Xu et al., 2009, p. 34-35). As Vargas Rodriguez and Manavella describe, foreign owned companies have historically created economic problems in the tourism industry since the employees often were not from the country where the tourism activities were offered. One of the main reasons was that the locals lacked the education needed to seek employment in tourism, an issue that no longer is as prominent (Manavella; Vargas Rodríguez). In Zúñiga’s eyes, economic leakage primarily occurs when tourists spend go to foreign owned mega resorts, an issue several scholars support (cf. Brohman, 1996, p. 53, 5; Jules, 2005, p. 1-2, 28; Pleumarom, 2009, p. 4). However, Zúñiga also states that “if you do ecotourism, I would say that 90 per cent stays in [the country]”, representing significantly less economic leakage than the tourism sector in general (cf. Jules, 2005, p. 2; UNEP, 2013).

Xu et al. (2009, p. 34) proposes that one of reasons for economic leakage is that tourism companies often employ non-locals. All of companies we have met almost exclusively employ Costa Ricans, mostly from areas right next to company headquarters. As Zúñiga explains it, “hire the local people you know, hire the guy who has his horses, hire the guide who has his own trails on his own property, the guy who reproduces butterflies. That is what ecotourism does, it is the way you can be sure that the money will stay here; it will be spread more equally”. In the context of Costa Rican ecotourism, Xu et al.’s (2009, p. 34) reasoning consequently does not seem to be especially applicable.

Cruz stresses that all revenues have to be invested in the communities somehow, through either capacity building or promotion. She states that many ecotourism lodges in Costa Rica are foreign owned, “but normally theses foreign people are into ecotourism and really care for the community where they are living”. However, Martinez and Vargas Rodriguez argue that multinational companies within this tourism niche are not that common. Like it is in Jacamar’s case, Cordero explains that “It is a local owner, a local company, money stays here because of taxes and all the different services the company needs”, indicating that locally owned companies do not contribute to economic leakage to the same extent as multinational corporations (cf. Brohman, 1996, p. 53, 55; Jules, 2005, p. 1-2, 28; Pleumarom, 2009, p. 4).

6.2.3 Tourists’ economic effect on local communities

Tourists are vital for developing sustainable tourism in a successful manner (Sharpley, 2006, p. 8-9), indicating that customers are key financially as they buy the products and services in the end. All companies studied cater for the needs of their clients and give customers the possibility of influencing organisations’ sustainability efforts (Cordero; Cruz; Gamboa Cespedes; Manavella; Martinez; Vargas Rodriguez; Zúñiga). This highlights the need to understand tourist demand in order to ensure that the supply of the ecotourism product matches demand (cf. Cole, 2006, p. 633). Although the tourists are needed for economic reasons, the amount of tourists coming in to Costa Rica and the protected areas where the tours takes place put constraints on the environment (cf. Beaumont, 2001, cited in Beaumont, 2011, p. 136; Cammorata, 2013, p. 200; Hall & Page, 2006, p. 284; Holden, 2003, p. 97; Honey, 2008, p. 284; UNWTO, 2002).
Similarly, tourists’ presence affects the locals they encounter during their vacations (cf. Budeanu, 2005, p. 91).

Cruz describes that locals become more willing to sell their properties when more people show attention to their geographical area. Further, she states that “is always good to have new ideas and new visions but there should be a limit on how much someone that is not from the country really can buy land”. When the interests are increased, it may be more attractive for companies to operate there. If these companies are foreign, it may result in amplified economic leakage (cf. Brohman, 1996, p. 53, 55; Jules, 2005, p. 1-2, 28; Pleumaram, 2009, p. 4). Selling land to foreigners means that non-locals will use the resources, constraining locals’ access to natural resources (Cruz), something that limits locals’ opportunity to sustain a good quality of life (cf. Everett, 1997, p. 147; Onestini, 2012, p. 33; Pogge, 2009, p. 5; WCED, 1987, ch. 9, para. 9).

6.2.4 The tour operators’ going concern

According to Vargas Rodríguez, the economic dimension is most important and difficult to work with. This dimension is required to ensure a company’s going concern (Bendell & Kerings, 2005, p. 379). Economic stability enables social and environmental initiatives (Manavella; Vargas Rodríguez; Zúñiga). Manavella describes that “If you don’t take it [the economic part] into consideration, you end up supporting causes out of good heart. This is a good thing if you are a person, but not a company because then you will go broke”, emphasizing the importance of economic concerns to sustainable development (cf. Bansal, 2002, p. 123; Edgeman & Hensler, 2001, p. 86, 89). Therefore, Manavella expresses that if you accommodate for economic concerns, you have the opportunity to work with social and environmental efforts in the long run.

In addition, both Cordero and Vargas Rodríguez mentioned that engaging in ecotourism leads to significant cost increases. However, both Gamboa Cespedes and Zúñiga explain that the decision to engage in ecotourism has not decreased company revenues. Zúñiga states that “I lose clients from one side, but I make clients from another” and “I see the finances every year and they are pretty much the same, it has not changed”. This highlights that the choice to target travellers with an interest in sustainability makes sense financially, supporting the discussion on ecotourists as an economically viable target group (Dolnicar et al., 2008, p. 207; Harrison & Wicks, 2013, p. 107; Moeller et al., 2011, p. 158-166). According to Gamboa Cespedes, it is just a matter of how companies prioritise what initiatives to invest in and support, indicating that there is a need for financial investments in order to enable social initiatives (cf. McKercher, 1993, p. 10; Moeller et al., 2011, p. 156). Therefore, if ecotourists are financially viable to target (Dolnicar et al., 2008, p. 207; Harrison & Wicks, 2013, p. 107; Moeller et al., 2011, p. 158-166), the ecotourism tour operators will secure a sufficient inflow of capital that may enable investments in responsible initiatives. In the long run, Vargas Rodríguez therefore argues; “if we use tourism in a good way under the sustainability ideas, it will create a very good economic development”.

6.2.5 Summative reflections

Conclusively, all operators experience that they contribute to economic growth. The respondents are experiencing that the companies they are working in contribute to economic benefits. If handled in the proper way, it can be beneficial to the tour
operators, their employees and the local communities. The companies create jobs and are in a position to help communities to grow and develop on their own. Being local, the tour operators also discourage the revenues from leaking out, given that they reinvest their earnings locally. As shown greater detail in the following sections however, the tourists who pay for tours to ensure the economic viability of the companies also bring negative aspects with them, affecting both the local environment and communities they encounter. Still, we would argue that economic aspects are key to organisations’ abilities to engage in socially and environmentally responsible initiatives.

6.3 Social impact

Social concern is an important factor when it comes to ecotourism’s contributing to sustainable development (Powell & Ham, 2008, p. 468). In this area of interests, the interviewees has expressed their experiences of the company-community aspect, effect on the local situation, cultural aspects and last but not least, employment and employees. Their answers are found in Appendix VI Social concerns.

6.3.1 The company-community aspect

According to Cruz, ecotourism is about keeping the needs of local communities in mind. As highlighted in the academic debate on sustainable development, companies are embedded within a larger societal structure (Bansal, 2002, p. 123-124; Ehrenfeld, 2004, p. 6), indicating that it is important to acknowledge the needs of local society (Nguyen & Slater, 2010, p. 7). All respondents acknowledge the importance of community involvement to social development, enabling ecotourism tour operators to promote social equity in the societies in which they operate (cf. Bansal, 2002, p. 123; Kaufman, 2009, p. 384). This allows communities to pursue ownership of ecotourism processes, something that promotes social equity (cf. Bansal, 2002, p. 129; Crapper, 1998, p. 21; Hardy & Beeton, 2001, p. 168; UNWTO & UNEP, 2002, p. 15, 62).

However social initiatives are hard, as the “locals are not that well organised” (Zúñiga). Manavella and Martinez raise the same issue, as social engagement only is possible if projects are well managed. However, it may be hard for the locals to organise themselves as they lack the knowledge and resources to contribute (Vargas Rodriguez). Furthermore, if communities do not want to participate, the efforts will fall flat (Vargas Rodriguez), resulting in project failures (cf. Bruyere et al., 2009, p. 55; Lai & Nepal, 2006, p. 1125; Ormsby & Mannie, 2006, p. 283ff.; Xu et al., 2009, p. 35). In other words, tour operators need community commitment to optimise social initiatives (Cruz). However, to achieve community commitment, community members must be allowed to participate (Fukuda-Parr, 2003, p. 303). One way of increasing community participation is to develop local partnerships, creating mutual benefits (Gamboa Cespedes). Still, it is important to increase communities’ capacity and knowledge, otherwise making it hard for everyone to act on equitable terms (Dunn & Hart-Steffes, 2012, p. 73; Fukuda-Parr, 2003, p. 303, 308).

To work on their social responsibility, Iguana Tours sometimes search for projects to support (Martinez). However, as Zúñiga highlights, it is better if the initiatives come from the communities. Still, the local communities’ lack of organisation sometimes requires the companies to take the initiative (Zúñiga). This makes the ideas less rooted locally and thus less likely to succeed, “not because of the community, it was because it
was not a project from the community” (Manavella). Otherwise, ecotourism companies failing to acknowledge local interest may be criticised (Bruyere et al., 2009, p. 55; Lai & Nepal, 2006, p. 1125; Ormsby & Mannie, 2006, p. 283ff.; Xu et al., 2009, p. 35). Therefore, it is important that companies plan with the communities and not only for them, enabling local inhabitants to participate and influence the processes (Cruz). If locals are not allowed to influence “that community could think that we are not something good, so we [ecotourism tour operators] have to work with them and provide the opportunities to develop” (Vargas Rodriguez).

However, it may be difficult for local communities to define their needs. As Cruz argues; “it is a challenge to really get a sense of what the community really wants and according to that, help them to find the tools to plan their community and their tourism destination”. For instance, Il Viaggio Travel and their clients donated paint to a school in need for refurbishment. However, it took the community six months to organise to paint the school (Zúñiga). Therefore, even if customer engagement in social activities is important (cf. Kontogeorgopoulos & Chulikavit, 2010, p. 628; Mbaiwa, 2005, p. 222; Sharpley, 2006, p. 8-9), we would argue that it is not possible to expect immediate results. As Cruz mentions, the slow pace of communities can make community initiatives time-consuming. “Sometimes the market wants to go a lot faster and the community is not willing to go that fast so there is a clash” (Cruz). Therefore, stakeholders can become obstacles for company purposes (cf. Goodpaster, 1991, p. 59).

Some communities want something in return by contributing to ecotourism. Therefore, it is easier to work with communities whose main concern is sharing their culture (Zúñiga). Still, it is important to create mutual gains for tour operators and their communities (Manavella). The answer is therefore not donations; it should rather be proactive, long-term and something that tour operators and communities benefit from (Manavella). Even if donations may solve current societal problems, giving locals access to financial resources (cf. Everett, 1997, p. 147; Manavella; Onestini, 2012, p. 33; WCED, 1987, ch. 9, para. 9), it does not provide long-term benefits (Manavella). However, it is important not to be blinded by the search for long-term results, both present and future needs should be prioritised (Anand & Sen, 2000, p. 2038; Kaufman, 2009, p. 398). Still, initiatives require much work and solid economic foundations, something all operators cannot provide without challenging their economic stability (Zúñiga). Although all interviewees encourage community involvement, insufficient financial resources give economic concerns priority (cf. Bansal, 2002, p. 124).

6.3.2 Ecotourism affecting the local social situation

Despite the priority given to donations or collaborative approaches, all respondents expressed that they engaged in social initiatives. According to Zúñiga, “if we [Il Viaggio] have a way to canalise efforts, we do”. One way of engaging and canalising efforts is to invest in local community education, targeting children and young students (Cruz; Manavella; Martinez). Cruz argues that it is the tour operators’ responsibility to help increase community knowledge, which in turn may lead to increased income possibilities. It is therefore important that communities are provided tools to participate in ecotourism in order for community members to contribute to local development prospects (Vargas Rodriguez). This aspect is essential, because if the tour operators increase the knowledge of the locals, they contribute to increased social inclusion and equality (Dos Santos et al., 2013, p. 107; Dunn & Hart-Steffes, 2012, p. 73; Fukuda-
However, locals should not become too dependent on tourism, in case tourism disappears from an area (Cruz), an aspect that is supported by the dynamic, seasonal nature of ecotourism (cf. Funnell & Bynoe, 2007, p. 168; Slob & Wilde, 2006, p. 22; Weinberg et al., 2002, p. 377).

Also, tour operators’ have to teach tourists how to behave respectfully to locals (Cruz; Zúñiga). Overall, all office respondents highlighted the importance of raising tourists’ awareness on sustainable development, either by informing them or encouraging them to support their initiatives. This is hard, as guides have limited time to speak to each tourist, especially during the high seasons due to full schedules and fully booked tours (Pichardo). However, although ecotourists are considered as more responsible than mass-tourists (Angel Bamavedes; cf. McKercher, 1993, p. 11-12; Dolnicar et al., 2008, p. 207), some do not care about the information provided (Manavella; Pichardo; Zúñiga). This indicates that tourists may ignore the worries of the world when they travel (cf. Collins-Kreiner & Israeli, 2010, p. 137-138; McKercher, 1993, p. 11-12; Sharpley, 2006, p. 19). Therefore, Moeller et al. (2011, p. 166) encourage ecotourism companies to target responsible travellers. However, selectively targeting customers is hard, as tour operators have limited control over who buys the services they offer (Manavella).

Still, ecotourism is fundamentally concerned with making conscious choices (Angel Bamavedes), managing the tours in responsible ways (Manavella; Vargas Rodríguez). We would argue that this is of uttermost importance as the tours often take place in natural areas, utilising and taking advantage of the experiences nature has to offer (e.g. Beaumont, 2001, cited in Beaumont, 2011, p. 136; Cammorata, 2013, p. 200; Hall & Page, 2006, p. 284; Holden, 2003, p. 97; Honey, 2008, p. 284; UNWTO, 2002). When people and organisations start making conscious decisions, there will be benefits for the stakeholders involved in the ecotourism industry (Angel Bamavedes; Cordero; Vargas Rodríguez). The office employees are conscious about the companies’ possibilities to influence local communities, mainly collaborating with organisations, businesses and community groups when executing their tours. In other words, you need to look beyond tourism to see the bigger picture in which tour operators are embedded (Gamboa Cespedes). Therefore, the claim that ecotourism companies are embedded within a larger societal structure is supported (Ehrenfeld, 2004, p. 6).

Several respondents highlighted that the increased inflow of people to the local communities brings with it unwanted consequences, mainly increased prostitution and drug abuse (Angel Bamavedes; Cordero; Cruz; Manavella). According to Angel Bamavedes, “at the moment they have somebody with money pay, immediately they get somebody that will sell”. This indicates that (eco)tourism brings unwanted and unintentional effects (cf. Honey, 2003, p. 41; Zambrano et al., 2010, p. 78). These effects are not consistent with the values of ecotourism (e.g. Cammorata, 2013, p. 200; Hall & Page, 2006; Honey, 2008, p. 32-33). Although the tour operators condemn these results, they still damage the ecotourism product (Cruz; Manavella). Even though these negative effects are more related to conventional tourism, it still affects the product of the ecotourism tour operators (Angel Bamavedes; Cordero). Therefore, it is important reducing or preventing these issues by engaging in social initiatives (Manavella; Martinez; Vargas Rodríguez). “In the end, all of us, we get benefits from it, but it is something more for the community” (Cordero), highlighting the benefit for the local community and companies to counteract societal problems.
In order to become more responsible, it is important to start with social issues internally, creating a value system supported and understood by all employees (Manavella). Again, the tour operators are only a few actors within a larger structure (Bansal, 2002, p. 123-124; Ehrenfeld, 2004, p. 6). As Manavella argues, real societal change stems from the informal leaders of communities. In this sense, ecotourism companies are merely formal leaders with the possibility to influence others to change (Manavella). Tour operators may in other words have little influence over how communities act upon their ideas, unless they succeed in reaching out to the informal community leaders. Unless the society is motivated to contribute, organisations working with ecotourism have a lesser chance at making sustainable social changes (Powell & Ham, 2008, p. 468).

6.3.3 Cultural aspects

According to Vargas Rodríguez and Zúñiga, one of ecotourism’s key aspects is to promote cultural authenticity, respecting traditional customs. If cultural genuineness is a priority, community members may be keen on accentuating their culture to become commercially attractive. This may ultimately result in the exploitation of locals’ cultural contribution (Budeanu, 2005, p. 91). However, the respondents argue that tourism gives locals a chance to promote their culture to receive benefits in return (Angel Bamavedes; Gamboa Cespedes; Manavella; Pichardo). Cruz recognises that bringing tourists to rural communities has allowed locals to “place their community on a map”, “not only empowering [them] to be self-sustained, but also [allowing locals] to be more proud of their own identity, of their culture, that they have something interesting to share to others”. In other words, this confirms the idea that ecotourism makes locals more proud of their culture, proving to the communities that their cultural input is valuable (cf. Budeanu, 2005, p. 91; Choi & Sirakaya, 2006, p. 1276).

However, it is difficult not to affect the culture of communities through tourism (Zúñiga). By allowing people from other cultures into rural communities, they have an effect on local behaviour. This causes a loss of cultural identity, as locals may want to adopt the customs and lifestyles of visitors (Angel Bamavedes; Cordero; Cruz; Vargas Rodríguez; Zúñiga). This may lead to a loss in commercial attractiveness of the places visited as local culture becomes assimilated to that of the tourists (Budeanu, 2005, p. 91). However, contact with tourists not only brings negative effects (Zúñiga). The encounters help increase local knowledge and open the locals’ minds (Cruz), supporting the reasoning of Beaumont (2001, cited in Beaumont, 2011, p. 136). Although the cultural authenticity may suffer (cf. Budeanu, 2005, p. 91), the awareness of locals increases, fulfilling one of the key aspects of ecotourism and sustainable development (Fukuda-Parr, 2003, p. 303). As a result, locals have a greater chance of improving their social situation, increasing social equality (Dos Santos et al., 2013, p. 107; Dunn & Hart-Steffes, 2012, p. 73; Fukuda-Parr, 2003, p. 308; Pogge, 2008, p. 5).

Traditional culture sometimes works against nature. Locals may be used to hunting for food, using forests unsustainably, endangering local flora and fauna to provide for their families (Manavella; Vargas Rodríguez). According to Manavella, “it is something that they have learned from their parents, and from their parents and so on”. Tourists or tour operators cannot accept this, so locals have to abandon their customs if they want to be part of ecotourism (Gamboa Cespedes; Manavella; Vargas Rodríguez). Although the behaviours may be questioned from a natural perspective, tour operators are not
respecting the traditions of their locals. As a result, locals may lose pride and ownership of their customs (cf. Budeanu, 2005, p. 91; Choi & Sirakaya, 2006, p. 1276). In addition, encouraging communities to change has a negative impact on tourism since the authenticity is lost (Cruz). Although the respondents expressed that they promote alternatives to fulfill local needs, the wish of sustaining the environment gives priority to future needs. Hence, intergenerational equity is given priority over intragenerational equity (Anand & Sen, 2000, p. 2038), depriving locals of their culture to promote future sustainability. However, the social impact of ecotourism depends on the tours offered, as some tours involve less local contact (Gamboa Cespedes). Still, tour operators have little control of what tourists do outside the tours (Manavella). Therefore, tourists may easily affect locals by their mere presence in the area in proximity to the tours (cf. Budeanu, 2005, p. 91).

Regardless of tourist and tour impact, local communities may lack knowledge of sustainability. Ecotourists are usually aware of sustainability (Dolnicar et al., 2008, p. 207). However, there is a generational lack of local knowledge. The younger generations understand the idea of making traditional cultural practices more sustainable, compared to their older relatives or those who mainly avoid sustainability because of their own ignorance (Angel Bamavedes; Cordero; Gamboa Cespedes; Manavella; Martinez; Pichardo; Vargas Rodriguez). However, the younger generation change their own behaviour and influence their friend and families (Gamboa Cespedes; Manavella; Martinez). Therefore, it is important that companies target children to increase local knowledge to foster future development (Dos Santos et al., 2013, p. 107; Dunn & Hart-Steffes, 2012, p. 73; Fukuda-Parr, 2003, p. 308; Pogge, 2008, p. 5). As a result, attitudes towards sustainability are improved (Pichardo).

6.3.4 Employment and employees

Ecotourism is an industry providing people with more responsible employment alternatives (Cruz; Vargas Rodríguez). Although it is important that all employees have the relevant knowledge on the tourism industry (Manavella; Vargas Rodriguez), ecotourism guides get most education on culture, community trends, conservation, and issues in need of attention, either internally or by external institutions (Cordero; Cruz; Gamboa Cespedes; Manavella; Martinez; Vargas Rodriguez; Zúñiga). This refutes the idea that a lack of knowledge constrains the employability of locals as guides (cf. Xu et al., 2009, p. 34), as the investments in local guide knowledge make it viable to hire them. Also, guides have a chance to improve their language knowledge in every tourist encounter (Pichardo). Consequently, guides get educated by working in tourism, gaining knowledge that they can pass on to their families and peers (Angel Bamavedes). Therefore, ecotourism tour operators who favour the employment of local people contribute to increasing the overall knowledge of society (cf. Dos Santos et al., 2013, p. 107; Dunn & Hart-Steffes, 2012, p. 73; Fukuda-Parr, 2003, p. 308; Pogge, 2008, p. 5). This aspect is reassuring for guides, and if they enjoy their work it has a positive influence on the customers’ experience (Cordero).

However, the tourism industry is vulnerable to cyclical changes, making employment within the industry insecure (Angel Bamavedes). The guides may also feel pressured, as they are responsible of informing customers about sustainability, always representing the tour operators and Costa Rica (Angel Bamavedes; Cordero; Cruz; Manavella; Martinez; Vargas Rodríguez). This is not surprising, as the guides have a responsibility
of promoting sustainability (Powell & Ham, 2008, p. 478). Still, the guides’ attitudes are positive and they are conscious about sustainability (Angel Bamavedes; Zúñiga), although it is hard to control how the guides inform the tourists (Zúñiga). It may be good to allow guides to influence organisations, how the tours are organised and what information to include, as guides “are in different [geographical] areas and I cannot see what is happening there” (Vargas Rodríguez). All interviewees state that tour guides have an opportunity to influence how businesses work with sustainability. However, Martinez clarifies that even though such input is valuable, the administrative personnel has to make the executive decisions. Angel Bamavedes experience that tour guides may have valuable input and that they do have the opportunity to influence, but states that “we do not really have that much to change”. As both Gamboa Cespedes and Zúñiga discuss, it is important to enable the right forums through which the guides are able to influence the companies they work for. We argue that it would be easier to ensure that the guides perform as expected if they can influence, especially as tour operators should recognise the importance of their employees’ contributions (cf. Powell & Ham, 2008, p. 478; Kontogeorgopoulos & Chulikavit, 2010, p. 628-629).

6.3.5 Summative reflections

Conclusively, it is important that local communities have a chance to influence ecotourism tour operators, as they often are a part of the tourism experience. In this sense, communities need to be provided with tools to handle the procedures by themselves, in order for investments in social activities to be viable. Tour operators have a responsibility to educate both locals and tourists, making them aware of sustainability. In long term, this may positively change cultural behaviour that damages the environment. However, tourism may damage cultural authenticity. In this case, companies need to compromise between community identities, environmental concern and financial viability. Furthermore, investing in employee education is beneficial as it makes it easier to employ locals, who in turn can share their knowledge. Also, the ecotourism companies do in our understanding provide locals with sought-after employment opportunities.

6.4 Environmental concerns

As argued earlier, it is important that nations dependent on tourism take care of the environment as it may prove to bring substantial economic income (Gamage & Boyle, 2008, p. 50; Mukherjee & Kathuria, 2006, p. 39). In Appendix VII Environmental concerns, the respondents’ thoughts on environmental protection and deterioration are presented, along with information about natural exploitation and deterioration.

6.4.1 Environmental protection and conservation

One way of promoting environmental protection is to increase local community knowledge and understanding (Angel Bamavedes; Cruz; Gamboa Cespedes; Manavella; Pichardo; Vargas Rodriguez). For example, “[Wave Expeditions] visit some sections of the schools and speak about how you reuse, recycle, we teach them how to take care of the environment” (Gamboa Cespedes). Therefore, we would argue that the companies could target environmental problems through social initiatives that increasing local knowledge and social inclusion (cf. Dos Santos et al., 2013, p. 107; Dunn & Hart-Steffes, 2012, p. 73; Fukuda-Parr, 2003, p. 308; Pogge, 2009, p. 5). It is also important
to ensure that guides have proper knowledge about conservation (Cruz). However, all employees should be aware of the importance of environmental sustainability (Cordero; Manavella). This indicates that it is important to foster community and organisational environmental learning, both for collective and corporate good (e.g. Kearney & Zuber-Skerritt, 2011, p. 402; Kontogeorgopoulos & Chulikavit, 2010, p. 638; Smith & Sharicz, 2011, p. 79). However, although the educational and awareness issues are important, it may be difficult to affect the attitudes locals and employees have towards natural conservation (Manavella), as it takes a lot of work to change peoples’ minds (Cruz). On the contrary, Vargas Rodriguez claims that people employed by tour operators usually have a strong will to contribute to environmental protection. In addition, Angel Bamavedes, acknowledges that the guides and the companies they work for are keen on keeping up with the developments of environmental research. However, Onestini (2012, p. 34) shows that the issue of awareness is less significant; getting people to act upon that knowledge is the challenge.

Angel Bamavedes argue that a crucial aspect of environmental protection is to encourage community members to participate. In Costa Rican Trails’ situation, “We invite them and have some capacitation about something they will be interested in. So that is the way we work with them. We try to hear them” (Vargas Rodriguez). Brown and Flynn (2008, p. 40-41) support these statements by arguing that community and stakeholder engagement may make it easier for companies to sustain their local environment. One aspect raised by some respondents is that it is not only important to look to the direct impact of the tours, it is also important to encourage and help others who wish to contribute (Cruz; Gamboa Cespedes; Manavella; Zúñiga). Although it may be important for every tour operator to take responsibility for their environmental impact (Martinez), the environmental outlook is dependent on all companies’ consciousness collectively (Vargas Rodriguez). Therefore, it could be environmentally beneficial to help and encourage initiatives outside the companies, even outside the ecotourism industry, aimed at promoting environmental protection (Gamboa Cespedes). Therefore, we feel that tour operators cannot depend on their individual efforts alone to ensure sustainable development, especially as the tour operators are rooted within a larger social context (Bansal, 2002, p. 123-124; Ehrenfeld, 2004, p. 6).

As Ehrenfeld (2004, p. 8) discusses, it is important to take the entire lifecycle of products and services into consideration when working on reducing ones environmental impact. In a tourism context, customer transportation, food consumption, direct environmental impact of tours etc. should be contemplated. The ecotourism product is dependent on the state of the local environment, an environment we would argue that tour operators, tourists, locals and stakeholders external to the ecotourism industry have an effect on and are affected by (cf. Gamage & Boyle, 2008, p. 50; Mbaiwa, 2005, p. 2004; Mukherjee & Kathuria, 2006, p. 39). As the environmental outlook is dependent not only on the tour operators themselves, they have to encourage others to address the issues they are promoting (Gamboa Cespedes). Otherwise, if environmental issues are left unaddressed by those who have an impact, it will just serve to further damaging the environment (Brown & Flynn, 2008, p. 40), something that will have a large impact on the development prospects of developing nations (Bretschger & Valente, 2011, p. 837; Sobhani et al., 2009, p. 168). As a result, the ecotourism product will be challenged, challenging the economic stability of working with ecotourism (cf. Gamage & Boyle, 2008, p. 50; Mukherjee & Kathuria, 2006, p. 39).
Many of our respondents highlighted that issues such as recycling, garbage disposal policies, and minimal energy and resource consumption are important to the environmental impact of ecotourism (Cordero; Cruz; Gamboa Cespedes; Manavella; Martinez). Overall, it is important that ecotourism operators engage in facilitating the protection of the environment (Martinez). It is common that tour operators help cleaning up the streets of local communities. This is something that is not directly associated to the tours, but it helps the companies to improve the state of the local environment (Vargas Rodriguez; Zuñiga). This shows that, it is not only the tours that should have minimal environmental impact; rather the overall initiatives of ecotourism companies should minimise nature’s degeneration (Kontogeorgopoulos & Chulikavit, 2010, p. 638). As Cordero argues, it is important to develop a set of environmental policies to facilitate the reduction of corporate environmental impact. However, the initiatives cannot stop when policies are in place (Nguyen & Slater, 2010, p. 7). Initiatives must be reflected in everyday business activities, enforcing employment practices, utilisation of nature and educating local community members to enable the reduction of environmental harm (Zambrano et al., 2010, p. 79; cf. Liu, 2003, p. 469-470).

When locals understand that ecotourism may bring benefits through increased income, and the promotion and respect of local culture, local community members may be keener on promoting resource conservation (Angel Bamavedes). According to Vargas Rodriguez: “I think that tourism is a very good tool to teach people how important it is to work with conservation. They can learn that it is a way to produce income but in a way that we can protect and use it in a very good way”. Therefore, the industry may prove to give locals alternatives that are beneficial to themselves and the environment (Manavella). Gamboa Cespedes and Pichardo argue that environmentally responsible initiatives attract more tourists; especially since tourists get better at assessing the initiatives operators prior to making any reservations (Gamboa Cespedes). Therefore, we would argue that if locals contribute to environmental initiatives, they in turn might help increase the success of the operators (cf. Bansal, 2002, p. 123-124; Ehrenfeld, 2004, p. 6). However, the environmental initiatives must make sense locally, otherwise there are less incentives for locals to promote environmental protection (Brown & Flynn, 2008, p. 40-41; Mbaiwa, 2005, p. 219).

Several of the respondents highlight that they educate their clients during the tours (Cordero, Manavella; Vargas Rodriguez). According to Cordero, it is important to “tell to the people, to the clients, the customers, that we work and every activity that we offer is focusing to promote less impact of tours in the forest”. This allows tour operators, and specifically guides, to influence the behaviour of tourists, indicating that there is a possibility to reduce the environmental impact of the tours (Kontogeorgopoulos & Chulikavit, 2010, p. 628; Mbaiwa, 2005, p. 222). It is also important that the tour operators invest in equipment of minimal impact and creating sustainability guidelines in order to promote resource protection outside the tours (e.g. Cordero). Another way is to invest time and money in creating biological corridors, encouraging the protection of small portions of land to give local biodiversity the best outlook (Manavella). This again highlights that the main issue is not the type of tour tourists choose, it is how operators acknowledge and act upon the importance of protecting the environment in the choices they make (cf. Kontogeorgopoulos & Chulikavit, 2010, p. 638).
6.4.2 Exploitation and deterioration of natural resources, flora and fauna

Bringing international tourists into protected areas is damaging to the environment as the product takes advantage of the natural resources (Cordero; Cruz; Manavella; Vargas Rodríguez, cf. Beaumont, 2001, cited in Beaumont, 2011, p. 136; Cammorata, 2013, p. 200; Hall & Page, 2006, p. 284; Holden, 2003, p. 97; Honey, 2008, p. 284; UNWTO, 2002). As Cruz highlights, tour operators’ environmental initiatives will probably not compensate for the environmental harm of incoming flights, stating that; “I’m sure that the damage is deeper than what we can do by planting trees”. Tour operators are dependent on the aviation industry, which is dependent on the consumption of exhaustible resources (Cruz). The environmental impact will persist until the dependence seizes to exist (cf. Barbier, 2011, p. 235; WCED, 1987, ch. 1, para. 40). As the ecotourism industry is dependent on the environment (Gamage & Boyle, 2008, p. 50; Mbaïwa, 2005, p. 204; Mukherjee & Kathuria, 2006, p. 39), ecotourism may be regarded as a self-destructing process, depending on tourists coming in although it affects the environment far more than the companies may be able to compensate for. This situation is worsened when tourism gets out of proportion (Angel Bamavedes; Cordero; Zúñiga). It is therefore important that there are tour limits and that the tours’ impact is controlled (Zúñiga). Otherwise, the tours will only prove to cause further natural deterioration (cf. Mbaïwa, 2005, p. 224, Liu, 2003, p. 464; Lóránt & Tünde, 2010, p. 193). However, it is not the number of tourists that is important, it is their behaviour (Manavella). However, if tours were to be optimised to reduce their impact, tour groups would be smaller (Zúñiga). Although this would be better from an environmental viewpoint, tours would be economically unviable (Zúñiga).

All respondents claim that it is important to minimise environmental exploitation. However, it is important to highlight that “the sustainability of a company is not only to reduce, it is a lot of things like helping our company to grow and the small communities” (Gamboa Cespedes). This indicates that it is important to approach environmental issues holistically; a company cannot simply develop policies and leave it at that (cf. Ehrenfeld, 2004, p. 8; Nguyen & Slater, 2010, p. 7). However, there are still external organisations, communities and individuals contributing to environmental degradation that are impossible to influence (Manavella). This implies that there is a risk that tour operators may fail to reduce the reckless behaviour of people in their immediate surroundings, as they will not be in an ultimate position to combat the threats towards the regeneration potential of local ecosystems (Bansal, 2002, p. 123; Barbier, 2011, p. 234).

Tourism has in general made mistakes in the past, e.g. feeding animals to attract customers with exotic experiences (Angel Bamavedes). Although all respondents condemn tourists from feeding animals, the animals’ diets have already been changed, now eating what tourists offer them (Angel Bamavedes; Cordero; Cruz; Manavella; Pichardo; Vargas Rodríguez; Zúñiga). While ecotourism operators refrain from feeding animals and other sustainably reckless behaviours (cf. Ehrenfeld, 2004, p. 1), it will take time for people outside the ecotourism companies to realise why it is important (Angel Bamavedes). Although it is crucial that the guides affect the behaviour of the clients in the tours (Powell & Ham, 2008, p. 478), we claim that there always will be tourists outside the ecotourism tour operators’ reach. In addition, some tourists may take things from the places they visit to keep as souvenirs (Gamboa Cespedes). When tour groups get too big, the guides will have less possibility to inform the tourists and influence their behaviour (Zúñiga). However, some tourists do not care despite them getting the proper
information (Pichardo; Zúñiga). In other words, although it is important to improve the environmental outlook of the tours (cf. Kontogeorgopoulos & Chulikavit, 2010, p. 628; Mbaïwa, 2005, p. 222; Powell & Ham, 2008, p. 478), the attitude of the tourists may be hard to influence, making educating clients redundant. It may also be hard to influence the behaviour of tourists, as guides only have limited time with them (Pichardo).

Another negative aspect of bringing people into protected areas is littering (Pichardo; Vargas Rodríguez). However, ecotourists usually dispose their garbage in the assigned places (Cordero). Martínez argues that the typical ecotourist is responsible and educated on how to behave sustainably. In comparison, locals contribute more to increase natural deterioration, either as they do not care or because they are not educated enough to understand the implications of their behaviour (Gamboa Cespedes; Manavella; Pichardo). According to Manavella, “Costa Ricans would tell you that the environment is really important but in practice you won’t find it to be so real. We contaminate more, most of the rivers in Central American countries. It does not fit”. However, it takes time for companies to affect locals’ behaviour (Gamboa Cespedes; Pichardo). Still, Pichardo highlights that “we are improving day by day, there are more people that know about [sustainability], we have to take care the environment”. Again, this implies that it is important to foster local environmental learning to at least have a chance at making a change (cf. Kearney & Zuber-Skerritt, 2011, p. 402; Smith & Sharicz, 2011, p. 79).

Furthermore, environmental learning may affect local cultural aspects. As an example, hunters may be a potential problem (Cruz; Manavella; Martínez). Some of them eat endangered sea turtles to sustain their living, challenging biodiversity protection (Cruz; Manavella). Therefore, locals may be forced to change their behaviour and identity (Cruz). This would be equivalent to saying that “you have to change because we praise the turtles more than this activity” (Cruz). However, tourism may provide other alternatives for them to provide for themselves (Cruz; Manavella). Manavella describes that hunters like “to be in the forest, and to hunt in a way not actually pulling the trigger but by chasing and following the animals. That is their thrill, but they could be photographers, pulling another trigger”. Again, ecotourism therefore provides locals with alternative employment and livelihood opportunities (Xu et al., 2009, p. 33).

6.4.3 Summative reflections

In conclusion, knowledge is key when it comes to environmental protection and conservation. Without a proper understanding for sustainable development, customers, employees and local inhabitants will not realise the tourism related benefits, making them unable to transfer sustainability initiatives to other contexts. Companies play an important role in supporting such educational initiatives. Furthermore, it is important to approach sustainability holistically and align the business practices so that sustainable development is incorporated throughout the entire companies. Ecotourism is contradictory, emphasising sustainable initiatives while damaging the environment by its mere presence, e.g. degrading ecological bio-systems and littering the natural surroundings. Also, environmental concerns may cause social issues, illustrating the debate on which dimension of sustainable development to prioritise the most.
6.5 Extending the stakeholder perspective

As Hardy and Beeton (2001, p. 173) describe, stakeholder identification affects the organisational outcomes, goal setting and managerial aspects of ecotourism. This highlights the importance of stakeholder analysis. The respondents acknowledge the need to cater for the needs of different stakeholders and the challenges this may entail, something that is categorised in Appendix XIII Stakeholder concerns and greenwashing.

6.5.1 Stakeholder acknowledgement

All respondents express the importance of accommodating for the needs of their stakeholders. As Utting (2002, p. 5) puts it, companies need to take stakeholder needs into consideration. As mentioned in section 6.3.4 Employment and employees, employees have the opportunity to influence the company practices when it comes to sustainability. Both Manavella and Vargas Rodriguez describe that stakeholders, especially customers, assume that Costa Rican companies engage in sustainability. Furthermore, all companies try to engage local communities into their businesses operations (Cordero; Cruz; Gamboa Cespedes; Manavella; Martinez; Vargas Rodriguez; Zúñiga). This is important as the locals’ perceived benefit will impact the extent to which they are willing to contribute (Crapper, 1998, p. 31).

However, it may be difficult to cater for all stakeholder needs, as they are not always aligned. Zúñiga explains that stakeholders may have interests contradicting what companies want. In this case, companies may need to compromise their own interests in favour of overall stakeholder interests (Goodpaster, 1991, p. 57-58, 61-62). This puts pressure on companies to prioritise stakeholder interests, even though it may not be appropriate in the organisations’ eyes (Zúñiga). Besides, stakeholder interests may also differ between the individuals belonging to a specific stakeholder group, making it difficult to collaborate with individual communities (Cruz). This suggests that it may be complex for companies to concern stakeholder interests, since there are multiple different interests both between different stakeholders but also within stakeholder groups (cf. Cater, 1995, p. 23; Goodpaster, 1991, p. 57-58, 61-62; Jamal & Stronza, 2009, p. 172; Moeller et al., 2011, p. 166-167; Sharpley, 2006, p. 14; Utting, 2000, p. 5). Therefore, companies should identify what stakeholders that are most important (cf. Hardy & Beeton, 2001, p. 171, 174; Jamal & Stronza, 2009, p. 172; Utting, 2000, p. 5).

According to Cordero, employees and customers are the most important stakeholders, because “the employees are the ones that have contact with the customers and in the end, we work for the customers”. Employees, especially tour guides, are key stakeholders in the tourism industry since they are the representatives of the companies, possibly having an impact on companies’ sustainability practices (cf. Powell & Ham, 2008, p. 478; Kontogeorgopoulos & Chulikavit, 2010, p. 628-629). Although employees in general should have incentives to ensure the viability of ecotourism’s sustainable practices (Lai & Nepal, 2006, p. 1117-1118), Manavella argues it is difficult, but important, to influence the interests of local communities and employees, especially office employees, to engage in sustainable development.

The tourists as a stakeholder group influences the local situation through their behaviour and how they invest their money (cf. Harrison & Wicks, 2013, p. 107; Sharpley, 2006, p. 8-9). Ecotourists, however, differ in terms of interests and behaviour (Cordero; Gamboa
Cespedes; Zúñiga), indicating that they can be divided into several subgroups (Moeller et al., 2011, p. 166-167; Sharpley, 2006, p. 14). This again highlights the difficulty of targeting specific stakeholder sustainability needs (cf. Cater, 1995, p. 23; Goodpaster, 1991, p. 57-58, 61-62; Jamal & Stronza, 2009, p. 172; Moeller et al., 2011, p. 166-167; Sharpley, 2006, p. 14; Utting, 2000, p. 5). However, customers do not show a large interest in sustainability (Cordero; Martínez; Pichardo; Zúñiga). The main reason is that they disregard sustainability in favour of low prices, despite them valuing sustainable initiatives (Martínez). Therefore, it may be economically unjustifiable for ecotourism companies to promote sustainability over price to customers who do not put sustainable efforts first (Zúñiga). Still, many tourists are interested in, and conscious about, sustainability and that it is something they look for (Vargas Rodríguez). Highlighting that it is economically viable to promote sustainability (Dolnicar et al., 2008, p. 207; Moeller et al., 2011, p. 158, 166), even though it may be difficult (Manavella).

Even though the environment as a stakeholder also is important (Holden, 2003, p. 100), it has occasionally been over-prioritised in comparison to the other elements of sustainable development. For instance, Cruz describes that “In certain cases, the concept of ecotourism has been more geared to national parks, to protected areas, forests, the trees, the birds and all the animals, and the human beings are somehow taken away from that scene [...]”, meaning that the social dimension sometimes is neglected. This challenges Freeman (1985) and Harrison and Wicks’ (2013) reasoning that economic and social interests usually are given more priority. Further, Cruz states that people should be seen as a part of nature, not being excluded from environmental concerns. This emphasises the importance of combining different stakeholder needs, as the environment cannot be the only priority when working with sustainable development in the ecotourism sector (Holden, 2003, p. 95; Starik, 1994, p. 94). However, as the environment is unable to express its needs as individual human beings (Gritzner, 2002, p. 178), it is justified to highly prioritise environmental concern, especially as “development cannot subsist upon a deteriorating environmental resource base” (WCED, 1987, ch. 1, para. 40).

Manavella stresses that key stakeholders depend on the chosen perspective; the clients and operators that buy the ecotourism tours are important stakeholders for the companies, while it may be more important to acknowledge local communities for the actual tours. Moreover, Zúñiga emphasisises that “if you want your business to be truly sustainable, it has to be everyone. Your employees are important, your customers are important, helping the society is important so I would say it is equally important”. In this sense, all stakeholders need to be taken into concern, addressing their needs and requirements and also act upon these premises (cf. Utting, 2000, p. 5). However, it is hard to match different stakeholder interests (Cruz). Therefore, in order to address all stakeholders, compromises have to be made (Jamal & Stronza, 2009, p. 172; Utting, 2000, p. 5). As Manavella states, mixed stakeholder requirements hinders sustainability efforts as “it is hard to tell which ones that are the most important”, an issue that is supported by both Jamal and Stronza (2009, p. 172) and Utting (2000, p. 5). However, it may be possible to circumvent this issue, but it requires a lot of time and effort from the organisations (Manavella). It is difficult because “you need to change the perception of the people, the way they live, the way they do things and the way they perceive things. Sometimes that change is very hard [...]” (Zúñiga). This proposes that stakeholders complicate business sustainability initiatives (cf. Goodpaster, 1991, p. 59; Utting, 2000, p. 5).
6.5.2 Greenwashers

As companies are pressured by their stakeholders to be responsible, some companies may deceive their stakeholders that they engage to conceal their flaws (cf. Ramus & Montiel, 2005, p. 378), providing a false image of their organisation (cf. Stoddard et al., 2012, p. 235). Gamboa Cespedes, Vargas Rodriguez and Zúñiga all mention the issue of greenwashers in the tourism sector. Gamboa Cespedes describes that ecotourism has been a boom in Costa Rica, where people have put the label “eco” on everything only because of the word’s positive connotation. This reasoning is coherent with Corporate Watch’s (2001) definition of greenwashers; companies who deceive stakeholders by claiming that they are more environmentally friendly than they are. As a mean to reveal greenwashers, more documentation on sustainability related activities are required from companies in the tourism sector (Manavella).

For instance, laws, regulations and certifications make certified ecotourism companies obligated to hard and time-consuming work of writing reports on their sustainability efforts, while uncertified companies are less obligated to do so (Manavella). As a result, if certified companies fail to deliver reports showing accurate results, the stakeholders may expose the companies to public criticism (Manavella). Additionally, all stakeholders have not appreciated these reporting initiatives, as they may be suspicious that the reports are publicity stunts aimed at magnifying the companies’ real impact (Manavella). Consequently, increased documentation, initiated with good intentions, may damage companies truly committed to sustainability, as it requires a lot of work although some stakeholders do not realise the benefits of such documentation. Therefore, it may be appropriate to involve stakeholders, because if they are involved they will be more in place to understand the situation of the companies, becoming more willing to contribute (cf. Crapper, 1998, p. 21). Finally, Vargas Rodriguez argues that although some are not genuinely committed, they at least set aside some resources to sustainability related activities, something that emphasises that their effort still counts.

6.5.3 Summative reflections

Conclusively, stakeholder analysis is an important but difficult procedure that companies need to engage in. By identifying key stakeholders, companies may be able to prioritise which stakeholder interest that is most important. However, the process is complex as stakeholder interests often are contradicting, sometimes even standing in contrast with company interests. Additionally, key stakeholders may differ depending on the context. It is important that economic, social and environmental stakeholders all are prioritised, as they together are key to sustainable development. Engaging in sustainable development and ecotourism is challenging, as stakeholder influence prospects are important. Further, greenwasher initiatives have forced companies to extensive sustainability reporting, not always beneficial for the companies themselves.

6.6 Challenges of sustainable development

It is evident that there are challenges with taking the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development into concern in the context of ecotourism tour operators. Appendix IX Challenges of sustainable development presents thoughts on challenges and connections between the pillars of sustainable development. Also it highlights short- and long-term aspects of ecotourism and sustainable development.
6.6.1 Integrating the pillars of sustainable development

Many of the respondents express that the three dimensions of sustainable development are connected to each other (Angel Bamavedes; Cruz; Gamboa Cespedes; Manavella; Vargas Rodriguez). Cordero states that “I do not think you can choose one or the other because all of them they work together, and they are very important for, in this case, the company and also for the population”. He also mentioned that if companies only focus on one direction, it may affect the other pillars negatively, highlighting that there are difficulties in balancing economic, social and environmental concerns. However, according to Manavella and Vargas Rodriguez, the pillars of sustainable development should be aligned; otherwise, companies will not be able to function. Gamboa Cespedes believes that it is possible to combine the three dimensions and that the CST motivates companies to engage.

Numerous scholars have discerned the juxtaposition of economic, social and environmental concerns (e.g. Bendell & Kearins, 2005, p. 379; Coffman & Umemoto, 2010, p. 599; Mitchell, 2012, p. 463; Norman & MacDonald, 2004, p. 252-253; Slaper & Hall, 2011, p. 6). Manavella argues that it is impossible to combine the pillars of sustainable development without making any compromises. Martinez viewpoint is that economic, social and environmental concerns are contradictory. On the other hand, Cruz argues that it is possible to optimise the three pillars of sustainable development, but that is complex.

Additionally, sustainability is continuously changing, as it is a broad area of different concerns (Zúñiga). Therefore, it is of utmost importance to combine economic, social and environmental concerns in ways that makes sense to company stakeholders (Zúñiga). Manavella argues by catering for the different dimension, companies have better products to offer. “We will help the community, we will help the government and we will help ourselves, that is the three spheres right there” (Manavella). This takes a lot of work, emphasising that it looks easy in theory although it is difficult (Pichardo).

6.6.2 Highlighting the time perspective

Indeed, it is important to keep in mind that a time perspective is central in the concept of sustainability. As stated by WCED (1987, ch. 2, para 1), sustainable development is about satisfying current needs without damaging potential capabilities of future generations to satisfy coming needs. Many respondents discussed the time aspect’s importance to sustainable development (Cordero; Gamboa Cespedes; Manavella; Martinez; Vargas Rodriguez; Zúñiga). Thus, a perspective of time is essential when it comes to successfully working with sustainable development. Zúñiga explains that people often have a short-term focus although the long-term perspective is more preferable. In addition, Cordero and Gamboa Cespedes state that short- and long-term aspects should be combined. The importance of integrating short- and long-term views are further supported in theory (cf. Holden, 2008, p. 159; WCED, 1987, ch. 2, para. 1). In our analysis, prioritising a short-term perspective instead of a long-term view may create trade-offs between current and future needs. Manavella and Vargas Rodriguez describe sustainability as a continuous process needed in order for companies to function in the long-term. She states that; “The day that you say that you are 100 per cent sustainable you will probably not be sustainable because a part of sustainability is also to always check on what you are doing and how you are doing it”. Manavella and
Martinez describe that some companies have sustainability as an end in itself, but it should not be the goal of the organisation to leave it at that. This highlights that sustainability and ecotourism are ongoing and dynamic processes (cf. Funnell & Bynoe, 2007, p. 168; Slob & Wilde, 2006, p. 22; Weinberg et al., 2002, p. 377).

However, as earlier mentioned, the tourism industry is constantly changing (Cruz, Cordero; Martinez; Zúñiga; Vargas Rodríguez), which Martinez means makes it more urgent for companies to have a short-term focus as the industry is so unpredictable. Similarly, ideas on how to contribute to sustainable development are evolving continuously (Angel Bamavedes; Zúñiga). Although it in theory is important to plan ahead to ensure the need fulfilment of future generations (cf. Anand & Sen, 2000, p. 2038; Kaufman, 2009, p. 389), we would therefore argue that it is hard when you are not sure how ecotourism or sustainable development will progress. However, Cordero argue that it is possible for companies to partly predict the industry changes, but that it requires a lot of effort, indicating that it is complicated to reconcile present and future needs (Cater, 1995, p. 23). Still, it is important that companies are truly committed to the essence of ecotourism in order to contribute to sustainable development (Zúñiga), especially as sustainable development by definition requires both long- and short-term commitment (WCED, 1987, ch. 2, para. 1). Consequently we would agree with Martinez, arguing that ecotourism companies need to be flexible.

6.6.3 Summative reflections

In conclusion, the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development are clearly integrated, both supporting and contradicting each other. It is of uttermost importance that the three pillars are aligned and worked on simultaneously in order for companies to truly commit to sustainable development. In doing so, both a short- and long-term perspective is required, as both the current and future needs should be prioritised in order to accommodate for all three sustainable development dimensions at once. The constantly changing nature of ecotourism and sustainable development requires companies to follow the same dynamics, challenging organisations in combining a short- and long-term view in their business operations.
7. Concluding remarks

In this chapter, the concluding remarks of this thesis will be revealed, pinpointing ecotourism tour operators’ ways of handling economic, social and environmental concerns and the trade-offs their activities contribute to. Furthermore, the thesis’ theoretical and practical significance and contributions will be discussed, ending with a section of future research directions.

Figure 8 Concluding remarks

This thesis has been aimed at answering how ecotourism tour operators contribute to trade-offs between the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. In order to conclude what trade-offs operators contribute to, the objective of this study has been to examine how the concerns of sustainable development are managed. The study has been limited to local Costa Rican ecotourism operators.

7.1 Findings

7.1.1 Handling economic, social and environmental concerns

This study has revealed that ecotourism tour operators within the developing country case of Costa Rica are actively engaging in initiatives supporting sustainable development. Economically, ecotourism tour operators have proven to contribute to economic growth in local societies, by employing local inhabitants. Although tourism in general leads to economic leakage, our study highlights that the context of ecotourism tour operators is different. By keeping their investments local, having local owners, workers and partnerships, ecotourism companies may serve to create economic benefits for the local community. Also, by targeting responsible tourists looking for sustainable tourism alternatives, tour operators may generate the capital needed to invest in social and environmental initiatives.

Socially, local communities need to be included in the business processes in order to allow them to benefit from the ecotourism initiatives. For these initiatives to be sustainable, ecotourism tour operators in Costa Rica engage in educational support and provide tools to communities to self-manage processes within ecotourism and sustainable development. Also, in order to ensure community engagement, it is important that the initiatives ecotourism companies acknowledge the needs of society. These aspects combined may be beneficial to society, increasing social inclusion by appreciating communities, allowing them to take on ownership of the tourism processes. In addition, it is important to make everyone who is involved in the ecotourism industry aware of the importance of respecting the needs of the local situation, acknowledging the bigger picture in which ecotourism tour operators are embedded.
Furthermore, awareness is key to environmental protection and conservation initiatives as it may encourage people to accommodate for the environmental needs of society. Still, there are external factors, organisations, mass-tourism companies, and irresponsible tourists that the ecotourism operators have no control of, challenging their sustainable efforts. Therefore, it is important to raise awareness in order to gain external understanding for these initiatives. Ecotourism tour operators may engage in cleaning initiatives, resource restriction, environmental protection etc. These aspects improve local conservation and development prospects of developing nations, something that should make local stakeholders willing to support ecotourism’s objectives.

### 7.1.2 Trade-offs of ecotourism and sustainable development

Although there are ways for ecotourism tour operators to handle the three dimensions of sustainable development, this thesis has pinpointed that companies have to make compromises between economic, social and environmental concerns. Perhaps most evidently, social and environmental efforts require company investments. Therefore, if ecotourism companies in developing nations lack the financial resources needed, social and environmental efforts may be traded off in favour of the companies’ going concerns. However, tourists put constraints on local environment and traditional customs. To control the impact on the environment, it may be needed to limit tourist groups, making each tour less profitable. Through the social aspect however, locals may adopt customs of the tourists. This may in turn damage the tourism experience’s authenticity, reducing tour revenues, affecting social and environmental efforts in developing countries negatively. However, increased interest in an area may encourage locals to sell their properties, leaving them without access to resources needed to ensure their well-being. Therefore, although the economic dimension is important, it is a double-edged sword.

There are also trade-offs between environmental and social concern, as environmental interests sometimes contradict social aspects. For example, loss of cultural authenticity may occur when people are influenced to change their traditional behaviour in order to allow their actions to become more environmentally accepted. As ecosystem protection is important to ecotourism, it discourages people to behave in environmentally irresponsible ways. As a result, nature may be favoured over culture, discouraging the practices, culture and identity of local communities in developing contexts. However, local culture is important to the authenticity of the ecotourism product. If this authenticity is lost, local communities may lose their commercial attractiveness, ultimately trading off the economic concerns of local society. Still, this trade-off may in some ways be needed, as it favours the natural resources society depends on in order to ensure the current well-being and future development prospects of local communities.

As highlighted, there are trade-offs present in direct connection to different stakeholders, as ecotourism tour operators need to prioritise which stakeholder group that is most important. Sometimes, this means that companies need to set aside their own preferences or specific stakeholder interests in order to satisfy one stakeholder group. Finally, what complicates the trade-offs further is that there is an important time aspect present. This means that not only do ecotourism in developing countries like Costa Rica create trade-offs now, it is also a matter of a long-term perspective where current actions may affect future generations either positively or negatively. Conclusively, the phenomena of ecotourism, sustainable development and the triple bottom line are utopic concepts of ongoing concern. These concepts are unreachable as such, always requiring
some compromises between the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

7.2 Significance and contribution

7.2.1 Academic implications

The theories presented in the academic debate on ecotourism and sustainable development indicate that it is possible to balance economic, social and environmental concerns. Although it may be possible to balance the trade-offs between the dimensions, our results reveal that it is difficult, if not impossible, to optimise the prospects of the individual pillars of sustainable development in developing countries. Indeed, trade-offs are inevitable but it does not neglect the benefit of investing in individual effort of either economic, social or environmental concerns. This indicates that the theoretical view on ecotourism and sustainable development is utopic, as sustainability is not something you can achieve, it is an ongoing process of handling compromises between economic, social and environmental interests in order to foster continuous development.

7.2.2 Practical implications

Although our findings are not universally generalisable because of this study’s nature, it is possible to learn from its results. In order to ensure societal development, the findings from the case of ecotourism tour operators in Costa Rica indicates that instead of focusing on optimising individual economic, social and environmental initiatives, efforts should be made to limit the negative effects. Companies, organisations, institutions and local communities involved in and affected by ecotourism in developing countries have to face compromises between the aspects of sustainable development. Therefore, it is crucial that actors of ecotourism learn how to handle these issues.

7.3 Future research directions

As this thesis is limited to Costa Rica in terms of empirical data, one suggestion would be to examine ecotourism and sustainable development in another context, for example by conducting similar research in another country. Such an initiative would also make it possible to compare different contexts and possibly find common denominators and/or contradictory results. Also, more research on ecotourism and sustainable development in other contexts than this thesis may prove to increase generalisation opportunities. We also encourage researchers to also investigate ecotourism and sustainable development in other settings than our own, where tour operators are not the only ones contributing with empirical data to the specific research area. As showed in our thesis, ecotourism constitutes a lot more aspects than just tours, making it interesting to investigate e.g. hotels and transportation alternatives that are parts of the ecotourism product.

Another suggestion for further research would be to investigate ecotourism and sustainable development in a more quantifiable manner. As our research rather focused on individual views on the subjects examined than on hard data, statistics on e.g. the real environmental impact of ecotourism over time would be an interesting supplement to this area of research. As we have discussed, ecotourism and sustainable development are on-going processes, making the idea of investigating the long-term impact of ecotourism actors on local society, environment and economic development relevant.
8. Truth criteria

Research has to be rigorously carried out in order to provide any applicability. Although we will keep the evaluative concepts presented in mind throughout the process when designing our method, this chapter is primarily focused on providing a post hoc assessment of the research to evaluate the results that will be presented.

While validity and reliability are evaluation criteria commonly used to assess the rigor of quantitative research (Morse et al., 2002, p. 14), qualitative research may need to utilise alternative assessment principles. In the 1980's, the two concepts of trustworthiness and authenticity were introduced to assess qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Whereas the concept of trustworthiness introduces the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 18-19), authenticity represents the criteria of fairness, ontological, educative, catalytic and tactical authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 20-24).

8.1 Trustworthiness

In order to ensure the credibility of qualitative research it is important to have extensive contact with the phenomena that are investigated, something that in turn caters for the possibility of making in-depth questions about issues that are noticeable throughout the “prolonged engagement” (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 18). Our data collection process allowed us to travel to Costa Rica to meet our respondents in their natural environment, getting an intensive but extensive contact with the phenomena of ecotourism and its effect on the three dimensions of sustainable development. Our choice of conducting personal interviews allowed us to ask in-depth questions concerning the issues we found prominent in each encounter. By having different respondents, we were able to crosscheck and compare the data gathered from one interview with the others. This accommodated for the identification of similarities and differences between the respondents, a criteria that is important to the research’s credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 18). During the interviews, we also repeated what the respondents had expressed or issues discussed by other interviewees in order to make sure that we had understood the respondent correctly and to support or question issues discussed previously, ensuring credibility through member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 19).

To allow the reader to assess the results presented, we have aimed at providing a clear and schematic description of the different respondents and the ecotourism tour operators they ultimately represent. We therefore decided to include an explanation of each case early on in chapter 6. To make it possible to assess the scope of the overall dataset, the key points from each interview have been schematised according to the themes addressed by our interview guides. These aspects are important to make the qualitative
data gathered transparent so that the results may be compared with other situations of the same character (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 19). However, we believe it is important to reaffirm that we did not have any generalisability intentions when designing the research strategy of the thesis. Although it may be insightful that the results show how ecotourism tour operators contribute to trade-offs, it is important to not consider the results of our study as universal.

Throughout the development of this thesis, external individuals have continuously assessed the research process and results. This has taken form through guidance and comments from our supervisor, peer student feedback during work in progress-seminars and comments from our immediate peers. These aspects are important for the thesis’ trustworthiness, as peer feedback to support the writers in developing the research and writing processes is important to ensure that the credibility, dependability and confirmability criteria are fulfilled (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 18-19).

8.2 Authenticity

The concept of authenticity is concerned with the interpretation of the research. We have chosen to include all relevant aspects mentioned by the respondents in a schematic overview represented in Appendix V-IX, balancing the respondents’ reactions by presenting both the positive and negative effects of ecotourism on sustainable development. This is important to the fairness criterion of authenticity, showing a transparent presentation of the research data and results (Schwandt, 2007, p. 13).

The input of the respondents have made our understanding of the issues related to ecotourism’s impact on the economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development more practical. By using the interviews, we have been able to present results that either support or refute our theoretical framework, improving the understanding of the research matter. This understanding formed the basis of our conclusions, ensuring the educative authenticity of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 23; Schwandt, 2007, p. 13). Also, we have documented the responses of the interviewees throughout the data collection process, a process that has been carried out through interviews where we have been open about the purpose of our inquiries, with the objective of developing ontological authenticity (Manning, 1997, p. 98).

During the research process, we have focused on the primary stakeholders of the ecotourism tour operators we have included in this thesis. This has highlighted the needs of, and effects on, companies, local communities, clients and immediate environments. This has enabled us ensure catalytic authenticity, honouring the input of the respondents to make the outlook of the powerless and speechless more promising (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 24). Although we previously have acknowledged that some ecotourism effects may be observed and represented objectively, we have worked to allow the respondents the possibility of showing us their views of the research matter. This allowed the interviewees to have a sense of control over the issues we researched instead of turning them into mere subjects under investigation, accommodating for the aspect of tactical authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 24).
References


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**Personal communication**


## Appendix I Search phrases

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*Table 6 Academic article search phrases*
## Appendix II Interview guide: office employees

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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 Interview guide: office employees
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>The interviewee</td>
<td>Name/position/responsibility/period of employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Choice of profession</td>
<td>Reason, previous experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Type of tours</td>
<td>Leisure/educational/adventure/culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Possibility to influence</td>
<td>Means</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customers</td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Sustainability/safety/culture/nature etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interests</td>
<td>Participating/eco./soc./env.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic aspects</td>
<td>Seasonality</td>
<td>Need for an extra job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>Company, society, local community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social aspects</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Work/life balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family/friends</td>
<td>Passing on the knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Everyday life</td>
<td>Guides/local community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attitudes</td>
<td>Society, local community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Impact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental aspects</td>
<td>Everyday life</td>
<td>Passing on the knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>Impact of the tours on the natural environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade-offs</td>
<td>Eco./soc./env.</td>
<td>Difficulty, importance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Combining eco./soc./env.</td>
<td>Priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Conflicts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closure</td>
<td>Short-/long-term view</td>
<td>Concluding remarks, confidentiality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Closing questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8 Interview guide: guides
Appendix IV Interview respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Cordero, Gerardo</td>
<td>Jacamar Naturalist Tours</td>
<td>25 April 2013</td>
<td>50 min</td>
<td>Office, La Fortuna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Cruz, Kyra</td>
<td>ACTUAR</td>
<td>16 April 2013</td>
<td>1 h 10 min</td>
<td>Office, Escazú</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Gamboa Cespedes, Maicol</td>
<td>Wave Expeditions</td>
<td>25 April 2013</td>
<td>1 h 20 min</td>
<td>Office, La Fortuna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Manavella, Piero</td>
<td>Swiss Travel Costa Rica</td>
<td>12 April 2013</td>
<td>2 h 20 min</td>
<td>Office, Santa Ana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Martinez, Adrián</td>
<td>Iguana Tours</td>
<td>23 April 2013</td>
<td>40 min</td>
<td>Office, Quepos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Vargas Rodriguez, Jeldryn</td>
<td>Costa Rican Trails</td>
<td>17 April 2013</td>
<td>1 h</td>
<td>Office, San Pedro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Zúñiga, Emilio</td>
<td>Il Viaggio Travel</td>
<td>17 April 2013</td>
<td>1 h 10 min</td>
<td>Car interview, to Orosi Valley</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9 Management and office employees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Angel Bamavedes, José</td>
<td>Jacamar Naturalist Tours</td>
<td>26 April 2013</td>
<td>30 min</td>
<td>Car interview, to La Fortuna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Manavella, Piero</td>
<td>Swiss Travel Costa Rica</td>
<td>12 April 2013</td>
<td>Questions during interview 4</td>
<td>Office, Santa Ana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Pichardo, Dionis</td>
<td>Wave Expeditions</td>
<td>25 April 2013</td>
<td>Questions during interview 3</td>
<td>Office, La Fortuna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Pichardo, Dionis</td>
<td>Wave Expeditions</td>
<td>3 May 2013</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>E-mail follow up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10 Guides
## Appendix V Economic concerns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Economic growth</th>
<th>Economic leakage</th>
<th>Effect on local communities</th>
<th>Going concerns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angel Bamavedes, Jacamar Naturalist Tours</td>
<td>Job opportunities, good salaries.</td>
<td>Uneven income; lower salaries during low season.</td>
<td>Customer needs are important.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cordero, Jacamar Naturalist Tours</td>
<td>Job opportunities, good salaries.</td>
<td>Money stays in Costa Rica; local owner, local company, taxes etc. All employees are Ticos, mostly locals.</td>
<td>Customer needs are important.</td>
<td>Sustainability concern increases costs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cruz, ACTUAR</td>
<td>Tourism not always enough, needs alternative employment, cf. Economic concerns.</td>
<td>Only Costa Rican employees except for the marketing manager.</td>
<td>Customer needs are important.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Help communities by providing tools.</td>
<td>Foreign-owned ecotourism lodges is common.</td>
<td>More tourists makes locals sell their land.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All revenue is reinvested in local communities; promotion, capacity building, small grants etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contacting international corporations and state institutions to bring economic resources and create alliances.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamboa Cespedes, Wave Expeditions</td>
<td>Collaborating with local companies.</td>
<td>Everyone is Costa Rican accept for one of the owners. Approx. 60 per cent are locals.</td>
<td>Customer needs are important.</td>
<td>Inexpensive to engage in sustainability, it a question on how to prioritise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manavella, Swiss Travel Costa Rica</td>
<td>Job opportunities, good salaries if you work hard. The financial investments in sustainability have to make sense to the business.</td>
<td>Almost exclusively Costa Rican employees, approx. 70 per cent locals. Earlier, mostly foreigners were employed because of locals lacked the knowledge required.</td>
<td>Customer needs are important.</td>
<td>The economic aspect permits the other pillars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent</td>
<td>Economic growth</td>
<td>Economic leakage</td>
<td>Effect on local communities</td>
<td>Going concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martinez, Iguana Tours</td>
<td>Mainly job opportunities.</td>
<td>Most environmentally certified companies are not multinational.</td>
<td>Customer needs are important.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Almost exclusively Costa Rican employees.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pichardo, Wave Expeditions</td>
<td>Uneven income; lower salaries during low season.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Customer needs are important.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vargas Rodríguez, Costa Rican Trails</td>
<td>Help communities to grow and develop, strengthen economy.</td>
<td>Many of the tourism companies are Costa Rican, few employees are not Ticos.</td>
<td>Customer needs are important.</td>
<td>Economy is difficult and most important, it permits everything else.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Earlier, mostly foreigners were employed because of locals lacked the knowledge required.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sustainability concern is costly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zúñiga, Il Viaggio Travel</td>
<td>Job opportunities; employ as many people as possible.</td>
<td>Problem if tourists only go to megaresorts, but approx. 90 per cent of the tourism revenues stays in Costa Rica. All employees are Ticos.</td>
<td>Customer needs are important.</td>
<td>The economic situation is deciding how much the other aspects will be concerned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No economic setbacks, you attract other clients and no economic difference.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11 Economic concerns
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Company-community aspect</th>
<th>Affecting local situation</th>
<th>Culture/attitudes</th>
<th>Employment/employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angel Bamavedes, Jacamar Naturalist Tours</td>
<td></td>
<td>The industry creates job-opportunities that lead to benefits for the local families.</td>
<td>Local communities can promote their culture and receive benefits from tourism in peers.</td>
<td>Get a chance to share knowledge with family and peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Drugs, prostitution because of higher people turnover.</td>
<td>Locals are affected and inspired culturally by the incoming tourists. Both good and bad, increased knowledge VS. increased assimilation.</td>
<td>Unstable industry, insecure employment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>However, mostly conventional tourism. Ecotourism and ecotourists have other values.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ecotourism is about making conscious choices.</td>
<td>Cultural knowledge gap, generational issue.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teach people how to change their behaviour, the local community.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cordero, Jacamar Naturalist Tours</td>
<td>Important to engage in local community engagement.</td>
<td>Help local schools, cleaning and painting. Supporting children’s rights. Urge customers to help.</td>
<td>Tourism changes culture as locals and tourists encounter each other.</td>
<td>Language knowledge, English, is important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In the end, all get benefits. People are getting more conscious.</td>
<td>Locals not aware as the tourists when it comes to sustainability, cultural knowledge gap. Generational issue.</td>
<td>Guides need proper training, through INAE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Prostitution because of more people coming in.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Inform clients about reducing the impact. Employees are very important for the customer experiences.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
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<th>Culture/attitudes</th>
<th>Employment/employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cruz, ACTUAR</td>
<td>Highlights importance of community involvement. Need commitment from the communities. Plan with the community, not for them. Difficult for the communities to understand the needs of the tourism industry. Difficult to understand community needs and goals. Communities have a slow pace. Social in general neglected by tourism companies.</td>
<td>Increase local knowledge. Tell tourist how to behave to respect the local society. Extra income → invest in education. Drugs, prostitution because of higher people turnover → damages the product.</td>
<td>Placing local society on the map, external attention → Increase local pride, valuing local culture. VS. Change in local behaviour, loss of identity and cultural authenticity. Opens minds towards different cultures, tolerance.</td>
<td>Provides alternative career paths. Teach local guides about traditional food, poverty, economics, archaeology, negotiation etc. Guides inform about cultural preservation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamboa Cespedes, Wave Expeditions</td>
<td>Important to create community partnerships. Complex, hard to engage in community initiatives because of financial constraints.</td>
<td>Helping small, local and family owned businesses for the sake of the community. Help society through activities. Encourage customers to support. Educating the younger generation, school visits. Sustainability is to promote growth and helping others in sustainable ways. Look beyond tourism.</td>
<td>The culture changed to increase the benefits of sustainability. Communities promote their traditions, encourages cultural preservation. Less cultural impact on society of the actual tours due to the type of activity. Locals not aware as the tourists when it comes to sustainability, cultural and generational knowledge gap.</td>
<td>Arrange education with external parties, e.g. the Red Cross. Guides have the ability to directly express their input.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Manavella, Swiss Travel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
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<th>Employment/employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Important to work with community on mutually beneficial projects, but they have to be well managed.</td>
<td>Community projects, art fairs.</td>
<td>A chance for the locals to promote their culture. Protects cultural practices from disappearing.</td>
<td>Education has improved, especially in terms of language skills. Guides have to know different things depending on the tours they do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Donations are not the solution, do things proactively so that the company gets something back. Projects need to be rooted in the community.</td>
<td>You have to start working with social issues internally, including creating a solid value system.</td>
<td>Teaching people how to change the ways things always have been done for the greater good.</td>
<td>Possibilities to advance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The community is one of the most important aspects.</td>
<td>But stakeholders want different things.</td>
<td>Cultural gap in sustainable behaviour, local people want to do what they want, expressing ignorance.</td>
<td>The guides get allot of education, but other employees need it to. Important to increase everyone’s knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tourism has to be well managed. Wealth created more evenly.</td>
<td>Also important to teach visitors. Some do not care.</td>
<td>Culture works against nature.</td>
<td>No need for extra work during the low season from his personal experience as a guide. Depends on the quality of the season.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drugs, prostitution because of higher people turnover. Support projects targeted at eliminating these issues. Long-term effect.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Working as a guide is tiresome. Hard to balance work/life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prostitution, drugs, hunting, logging, it damages the product.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Guide responsibility, inform and influence customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change is born from informal leaders in the communities; the company is a formal leader.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Little control over customers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Must make sense to the company to engage.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent</td>
<td>Company-community aspect</td>
<td>Affecting local situation</td>
<td>Culture/attitudes</td>
<td>Employment/employees</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martinez, Iguana Tours</td>
<td>Sometimes the company has to find projects to support, otherwise; community projects approaches them. Communities need a lot of things, hard to decide how to prioritise.</td>
<td>Do not give money, find ways to canalise efforts to support community groups through projects. Support given to established, local efforts, help orphans etc. Taking clients to local initiatives. Working with younger generations. Provide children with activities to stop them from going of on the wrong track.</td>
<td>Costa Ricans traditionally unaware of sustainability issues, it is a generational issue and people start learning. Cultural transition.</td>
<td>Important to educate employees, guides are the face of the company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pichardo, Wave Expeditions</td>
<td>Less time to interact with customers in the high season, less social influence on them during the actual tours. Some tourists do not care.</td>
<td>The local knowledge gap is educational and generational. Attitude towards ecotourism and sustainability is improving. Show tourists how things traditionally were made, encourage cultural preservation.</td>
<td>Chance to improve their English when they come in contact with tourists. Workload, work/life balance depends on the season.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent</td>
<td>Company-community aspect</td>
<td>Affecting local situation</td>
<td>Culture/attitudes</td>
<td>Employment/employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
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<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vargas Rodríguez, Costa Rican Trails</td>
<td>Have to collaborate with the communities for development reasons.</td>
<td>Company consciousness key.</td>
<td>Important to promote culture.</td>
<td>I Learning through INA (Institutio Nacional Aprendizaie). English, history, conservation. Small internal courses on sustainability. All employees need to have knowledge about tourism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Invite community, capacitation building, listening to their issues. Locals have to have a will to contribute.</td>
<td>Local educational programs, cleaning campaigns. Find external help through the work with Fundacion Tropica. Important to give people tools as means for development.</td>
<td>Culture sometimes works against nature; people may need to change their traditional customs.</td>
<td>Guides key to inform customers about issues related to sustainability and culture in the tours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The company cannot do everything by themselves, need support from communities, other organisations etc. as well.</td>
<td>Community protection, stop prostitution, use local operators, reduce poverty. Irresponsible business operations = damaging.</td>
<td>Cultural assimilation, loss of identity.</td>
<td>Make a living, reduce poverty/inequality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social in general neglected by tourism companies.</td>
<td>Invite customers to participate, helping children in need.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zúñiga, Il Viaggio Travel</td>
<td>Local community involvement is a dilemma. Ideas work better if they come from the communities. Important that the communities are organised, and they usually are not. Need to tell the community what to do, push-theory. Many communities want something back when tourists come. Easier to work with communities who want to share their culture.</td>
<td>Supplies or money donations. Cleaning for the communities. Helping schools with supplies.</td>
<td>Authenticity is key. Important to respect people’s way of living.</td>
<td>Guides need to speak several languages, at least English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Initiatives takes time in, it is a local management issue.</td>
<td>Hard not to affect locals culturally. Does not have to be a bad thing.</td>
<td>Seminars on whatever the guides need to be updated about.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Visiting local artisans and small businesses. Tell customers how to behave, encourage them to help. Depends on the tour/tourist.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Guides are conscious about problems, but hard to control how they inform customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Try to support. Hard to find initiatives that have clear concepts. Company interest is key, hard being a small actor.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Guides enabled to give direct feedback to the company.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix VII Environmental concerns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Protection/conservation</th>
<th>Exploitation/deterioration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angel Bamavedes, Jacamar Naturalist Tours</td>
<td>Promote conservation to receive benefits. Increase local understanding and participation. Keen on following scientific progress.</td>
<td>The tourism industry has made several mistakes to impress tourists, learn day by day how to become better. Takes time to reach understanding. Conventional ways are worse. Animals change their behaviour. Locals and tourists feeding them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cordero, Jacamar Naturalist Tours</td>
<td>Informing the tourists. Minimal impact of equipment/transportation. Reduce use of resources. Working to develop guidelines. Employees on same page.</td>
<td>Conventional ways are bad. People litter, but most try to dispose of their garbage in the right places. Animals change their behaviour. Noise from the people coming in, changing the environment for the tours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cruz, ACTUAR</td>
<td>Revenues from parks → environmental protection initiatives. Educating tour guides and communities. Value the forest; protect the animals, encouraging learning. A lot of work. Teach locals how to change their traditional behaviour in favour of the environment. Garbage disposal policies.</td>
<td>Bringing tourists in is damaging, transportation etc. Resource use, e.g. water. Exploiting land. Animals change their behaviour. Locals and tourists feeding them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamboa Cespedes, Wave Expeditions</td>
<td>Helping others with good initiatives to conserve. Reforestation. Recycling programmes. Educate young people, teaching their older relatives. Good initiatives attract more people, marketing perspective of protecting the environment.</td>
<td>Clients taking things from the forests as tokens. However, consumers are aware and often browse the different operators, knowing what they stand for. The effect of water tours less damaging than other. Lack of local awareness causes resource exploitation. Takes time to change behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manavella, Swiss Travel</td>
<td>Revenues from parks → environmental protection initiatives. Preserve a small piece of land → protect a huge proportion of biodiversity because of its density. Resource protection, water treatment plant.</td>
<td>Local pride of the environment, however not shown in practice. Locals are worse when it comes to littering the protected areas visited in the tours. Badly managed tourism is damaging, e.g. no limitation causes soil erosion. Not everyone knows how to manage it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent</td>
<td>Protection/conservation</td>
<td>Exploitation/deterioration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manavella, Swiss Travel</td>
<td>Educate young people, teaching their older relatives.</td>
<td>Behaviour of tourists matters more than their numbers. Difficult to influence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guides educating tourists.</td>
<td>Animals change their behaviour. Locals and tourists feeding them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limits to acceptable change, make decisions based on observation on change.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work with hunters, loggers, locals etc. Challenging to change their behaviour.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop a carbon footprint initiative.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martinez, Iguana Tours</td>
<td>Recycling initiatives.</td>
<td>Little influence of the tourists, as they often are well educated and responsible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Important to engage, take on responsibility. Educate hunters etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pichardo, Wave Expeditions</td>
<td>Good initiatives attract more people, marketing perspective of protecting the environment.</td>
<td>People littering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local education initiatives.</td>
<td>Animals change their behaviour. Locals and tourists feeding them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of local awareness causes resource exploitation. Takes time to change behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some tourists simply just do not care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vargas Rodríguez, Costa Rican Trails</td>
<td>Educating communities.</td>
<td>Some resource utilization needed to make tourist activities possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cleaning initiatives.</td>
<td>People littering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employees want to protect the environment.</td>
<td>Not enough people working to protect protected areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promote conservation to tourists, educating them.</td>
<td>Limited control of visitors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dependent on all companies’ consciousness.</td>
<td>Animals change their behaviour. Locals and tourists feeding them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zúñiga, Il Viaggio Travel</td>
<td>Promote conservation with other operators. Helping initiatives of parks, schools, communities, groups.</td>
<td>Massive tourism leads to deterioration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cleaning initiatives.</td>
<td>Animals change their behaviour. Locals and tourists feeding them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ecotourism available to all.</td>
<td>Tourists pay little attention, large groups ➔ less informed clients.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13 Environmental concerns
## Appendix VIII Stakeholder concerns and greenwashing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Stakeholder acknowledgement</th>
<th>Greenwashers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angel Bamavedes, Jacamar Naturalist Tours</td>
<td>Key stakeholders are the customers and the employees. Customers have different interests and behaviour. They generally do not show that much interest in sustainability.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cordero, Jacamar Naturalist Tours</td>
<td>It is a challenge to match stakeholder interests.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cruz, ACTUAR</td>
<td>Customers have different interests and behaviour.</td>
<td>Greenwashers does not genuinely engage in sustainability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamboa Cespedes, Wave Expeditions</td>
<td>Key stakeholders depend on the perspective. Challenges with aligning sustainability with the company practices. Stakeholder interests differ and they need different reports. Some stakeholders expect all companies to engage in sustainability. Risk of bad publicity and being shut downed. People are unwilling to change. Convincing staff is key to the business.</td>
<td>Greenwashers make stakeholders sceptical towards all companies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manavella, Swiss Travel Costa Rica</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martinez, Iguana Tours</td>
<td>Customers do not show that much interest in sustainability. Price is prioritised the most.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pichardo, Wave Expeditions</td>
<td>Customers do not show that much interest in sustainability.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vargas Rodriguez, Costa Rican Trails</td>
<td>Customers are knowledgeable and conscious about sustainability.</td>
<td>Greenwashers started as a way of satisfying market needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zúñiga, Il Viaggio Travel</td>
<td>Everyone are key stakeholders; customers, society, employees etc. Stakeholder motives and company motives may contradict each other. People are unwilling to change. Customers have different interests and behaviour. They have a large influence but generally low interest in sustainability.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14 Stakeholder concerns and greenwashing
## Appendix IX Challenges of sustainable development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Integrating the pillars</th>
<th>Highlighting a time perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angel Bamavedes, Jacamar Naturalist tours</td>
<td>Economic, social and environmental concern is related to each other.</td>
<td>It takes time to realise the true meaning of ecotourism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cordero, Jacamar Naturalist Tours</td>
<td>No dimension is more important than another; they work together and are depending on each other.</td>
<td>Both a short-term and long-terms perspective is needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Difficult to find the balance between the dimensions.</td>
<td>The tourism industry is always changing. Difficult, but not impossible, for companies to predict the industry development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cruz, ACTUAR</td>
<td>Difficult, but possible, to maximise eco./soc./env. concern. There are always things to improve.</td>
<td>The industry is always changing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamboa Cespedes, Wave Expeditions</td>
<td>It is possible to combine the dimensions, CST is helping in that process. The dimensions are connected to each other.</td>
<td>Creating sustainable development and raising sustainability concern will take a long time. Combination of short-term and long-term is preferable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Something like CST should be applied in other businesses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manavella, Swiss Travel Costa Rica</td>
<td>Eco./soc./env. concerns should go hand in hand. Otherwise, the company will not function. Impossible to combine eco./soc./env. concerns without compromising.</td>
<td>Projects should be long-term.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sustainability is key to survive in the long-term. Sustainable concern is a continuous process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martinez, Iguana Tours</td>
<td>The dimensions of sustainable development are contradicting.</td>
<td>Long-term used to be important for the company, now it is not. Projects are long-term.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The industry is unpredictable, companies need to be flexible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pichardo, Wave Expeditions</td>
<td>Everything have to work together, otherwise companies will not be able to keep running their businesses.</td>
<td>It is not easy to become truly sustainable, it requires a lot of work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vargas Rodriguez, Costa Rican Trails</td>
<td>All dimensions need to be combined and make sense to people. Conflicts are current between the dimensions, whenever there are people involved issues will arise.</td>
<td>A long-term perspective is important. Long-term projects are preferable, but sometimes not viable. Tourism and sustainability is dynamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Companies need to be convinced by sustainability in order to manage it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15 Challenges of sustainable development