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Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd  
agus nan Eilean  
Colaiste na Gàidhealtachd an Iar

***Being there: Slow, fast,  
traditional, wild, urban,  
natural...***

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## **Introduction**

This collection of work from the 2013 Adventure Conference in Scotland reflects the rich tapestry of presentations enjoyed over three wonderful days on the Isle of Skye. Delegates were welcomed from around the world to the second such international conference – an event that has most definitely caught the imagination of both academics and industry practitioners and is now an annual – rotating – conference.

The papers here all essentially focus on the adventure *experience*: the existential accommodation of feelings, emotions, fears and pride which so often colour our time being outdoors. It is significant that these papers are drawn from outdoor education fields (from whence adventure tourism arguably originated) and from the tourism field itself. What is interesting here is that the reader will discern a shift from the passive consumption of thrills and constructed experiential settings, back towards a realm of learning, whether the participant be an individual on a social care programme or on an expensive tourist trek in an exotic location.

Thus, Bauer speaks of how the dynamics of the co-created adventure experience may be managed and clients' satisfaction improved, whilst Hayes, and later Johnson, discusses comfort, speed and stories in the setting (Hayes) and mindfulness in nature as a way of being, toward transcendence, for some social groups.

Hardwell deals with what we might call the supply-side of adventure, by dealing with the interrelationship between guides and clients, whilst Perez-Brunicardi is concerned with the way those guides and instructors learn their craft in order to deliver safe, meaningful client engagement. As Prince explores the ways in which writers capture the meanings of 'wild', 'nature' etc. in the spate of recent and not so recent writing on the subject, she shows that few outdoor educators actually provide this material.

Perhaps their art is the performance of being outdoors – and it is the outdoors of Africa that rounds off the collection. The context for our adventures is the geographical place in which they are enacted; Tshipala and Coetzee's study explores ways in which these lands might be cared for and sustained.

**Peter Varley and Steve Taylor**

**The Centre for Recreation and Tourism Research**

**May 2014**

# **What visitors want: Preferences and satisfaction in the adventure sector**

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## **Abstract**

The objective of this study is to explore the preferences of adventure tourists, determinants of their satisfaction and behavioural intentions, and the marketing consequences. It is based on a survey of the clients of nine Irish adventure providers, who rated the importance of 32 attributes and the companies' actual performance. The respondents regarded fun, good equipment and skilled guides as the most important aspects of the adventure experience; however, value for money and a sense of achievement contributed even more to customer satisfaction. While satisfaction had a positive influence on behavioural intentions, relaxation and the individual attention paid to the customer, two variables that did not significantly increase satisfaction, also played a role in generating recommendations and motivating clients to come back. Among all customer characteristics, age had the biggest influence on preferences; the type of activity made a difference for the perceived importance of a third of all items.

## **1. Introduction**

What matters most to adventure tourists? While risk or the semblance of it (Ewert, 1989; Buckley, 2012), rush (Buckley, 2012) and flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) have often been put forward as main motivators, there is a whole array of further reasons attracting people to adventure, from improving skills to novelty, from challenge to sense of control, from achievement to fitness, from social motives like making friends to having fun and improving status (Ewert and Hollenhorst, 1989; Buckley, 2012). The answer may also depend on the activity, on participants' skills levels or demographics. To quote just a few of many examples (Buckley, 2012: 962-963), participants in packaged mountaineering trips mostly want to improve their skills and gain experience (Pomfret, 2011), novices to whitewater rafting seek new experiences while experienced rafters are primarily looking for fun, rest and recuperation (Fluker and Turner, 2000: 384), and baby boomers want to get away from everyday life (Patterson and Pan, 2007). However, visitors' satisfaction with an adventure not only depends on the fulfilment of these expectations, but also on how the experience was delivered. This paper seeks to identify the most important aspects of an adventure by using two different approaches: on the one hand, it asks visitors directly what is important to them, on the other hand it looks at which factors most influence customers' satisfaction and their intention to repeat the experience.

There are a number of definitions for visitor satisfaction (Borrie and Birzell, 2001; Pizam and Ellis, 1999). Though it is sometimes used interchangeably with quality, both constructs are not the same. Quality refers to the supplier's performance, normally on a number of attributes, whereas satisfaction is the resulting state of mind of the tourist (Baker and Crompton, 2000). Both are frequently seen as the result of comparing actual quality with a benchmark that is often defined by expectations, following Oliver's (1980) argument that satisfaction depends on expectancy disconfirmation. Thus, Pizam et al (1978: 315) propose that "tourist satisfaction is the result of the interaction between a tourist's experience at the destination area and the expectations he had about that destination".

There has been considerable debate on the advantages and disadvantages of disconfirmation approaches such as SERVQUAL and HOLSAT, which both compare perception of actual performance and expectations. SERVQUAL has been widely used to measure service quality since it was introduced by Parasuraman et al in 1988; HOLSAT was developed by Tribe and Snaith (1998) for tourism, to capture satisfaction with the complete holiday. While SERVQUAL measures performance against best quality, HOLSAT uses expected quality as a benchmark, which can be lower especially when prices are cheap (Tribe and Snaith 1998:28). Among the weaknesses of both disconfirmation approaches are methodological problems of measurement (Baker and Crompton, 2000: Crompton and Love, 1995) and the difficulty that expectations depend on familiarity with the service (Carman, 1990:49); unlike e.g. in retail, there are no clear expectations for a one-time experience like a holiday in a new destination. Alternatively, importance-performance analysis (Martilla and James, 1977) contrasts performance on attributes with the importance respondents attach to these attributes; this has become a popular management tool for identifying areas of concern (high importance, low quality) or even quality overkill (high performance in spite of low importance). However, the predictive value of models with simple performance variables like SERVPERF (Cronin and Taylor, 1992; 1994) appears to be higher than that of those that use gap approaches (Crompton and Love, 1995; Baker and Crompton, 2000, Yüksel and Rimmington 1998, Fallon and Schofield, 2003).

In the leisure, outdoors and adventure sector a variety of models have been used to analyse visitor satisfaction on a wide range of attributes (e.g. Tonge and Moore, 2007; Akama and Kieti, 2003; Arabatzis and Grigoroudis, 2010; Murray and Howat, 2002; Papadimitriou and Karteroliotis, 2000, Tian-Cole et al., 2002; Tarrant and Smith, 2002). Studies of adventure mostly focus on one type of activity, and which attributes are identified as the most important varies substantially from study to study. Thus, in water-based adventure, Herrick and McDonald (1992) identified the setting, group behaviour and perceived crowding as important determinants of river visitor satisfaction. In Whisman and Hollenhorst's paper on whitewater boaters, crowding perceptions also influenced satisfaction; in addition, water flow levels and opportunities for challenge, excitement and skill testing mattered. According to O'Neill et al. (2000), safety played a huge role in diving; good facilities and equipment were also important, whereas the appearance of staff

and premises mattered less. In a few studies, the environment mattered: whale shark tourists cared most about being close to the animals and the staff's eco-friendliness (Ziegler et al. 2012: 695), and eco-tangibles (environmentally-friendly facilities and equipment) were the most important dimension in a survey of ecotourists (Khan 2003). Studies of skiers produced a wide range of results: Weiermair and Fuchs (1999) found that variety and fun influenced participants' assessments of the overall quality more than safety and aesthetical concerns; in Fick and Ritchie's 1991 study, assurance and reliability were the most important expectations. According to Alexandris et al. (2006), interaction with the employees and the quality of the physical environment such as up-to-date equipment and good maintenance of slopes played the biggest role for customer loyalty, and in Richards' 1996 analysis, skilled skiers cared most about the quality of the terrain, the runs and the snow, whereas beginners also considered facilities and price important.

Very few studies explicitly deal with the adventure tourist in general and visitor satisfaction across different activities. This paper seeks to close this gap by analysing which aspects of the experience matter most to adventure tourists, what drives their satisfaction and what stimulates their behavioural intentions for a range of adventure activities. It is based on a survey in which clients of Irish adventure providers stated how important various aspects of the activity were for them, how good their actual experience of these items was and how satisfied they were overall. Even though both importance ratings and performance ratings were available for all attributes, the combination of both in gap measures proved less useful than a separate analysis.

## **2. Method**

Based on a literature review to identify the most important contributors to customer satisfaction, a questionnaire containing 31 importance items and 31 performance items was drafted and tested in a pilot round with the customers of four Irish adventure centres. Respondents filled it in after they had participated in an activity; in addition, they were interviewed afterwards to find out if they felt that any factors contributing to their experience had been left out or if any of the items were unnecessary. The only slightly modified questionnaire was then given to clients of nine Irish adventure providers over the course of a whole season, from May to October. Overall, 622 questionnaires were completed. Some of the participating adventure providers were too busy or embarrassed to give very many questionnaires to their customers; the bulk of the completed surveys were generated by a big adventure centre that already had institutionalised debriefing sessions and by the author herself at another large adventure centre. Response rates in these cases were over 90 per cent, so a non-response bias seems unlikely.

### **2.1 The questionnaire**

The sections of the questionnaire included the importance of 32 attributes and actual performance, customer demographics, overall evaluation of the experience provided, satisfaction and behavioural intentions. In the first part, participants rated the importance of 32 attributes on a



Likert scale from 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important). In the second section, they assessed their actual experience. For each of these attributes, they had to state how strongly they agreed with a statement such as “I felt safe at all times”, using a Likert scale from 1 = fully disagree” to 5 = “fully agree”. In order to avoid a bias, all statements were worded so that a high score meant a positive experience, e.g. “waiting times were no problem”.

Four attributes were related to equipment and facilities, three to the setting, six to staff. Five items addressed organisational aspects such as waiting times. Though it is beyond the provider’s control, one question about the weather conditions was included as this might affect the overall experience in outdoor pursuits. Variables that did not belong to a category were the eco-friendliness of the activity and, of special interest in the adventure sector, whether people had felt safe throughout the experience. Another single attribute was “value for money”. As this depends not only on prices, but also on the quality received, value for money is not independent of the other variables.

In other service sectors like banking and retail, there is an ultimate purpose of the transaction like the purchase of a new sweater or a money transfer; in tourism, the experience itself is the ultimate goal. Consequently, the outcome is a state of mind rather than a purchase or a financial transaction. Therefore, a number of attributes were introduced to measure “outcomes”. One represented a tangible result: “I have learnt new skills or improved existing skills”; the rest were more subjective, describing the emotions of the participants resulting from the adventure. Among the outcomes that apply to any sort of holiday were fun and relaxation; other attributes tried to capture the specific motivation of adventure tourists: excitement, challenge, a sense of achievement, experiencing something new and improving one’s self-esteem.

In addition, visitors rated the overall quality (“Overall, I think this company provides a very good experience”) and their overall satisfaction on a scale from 1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied. Though there is a strong link between perceived quality and satisfaction, they are not identical. Respondents were asked whether they were planning to revisit or to recommend the company to establish the relationship between quality, satisfaction and behavioural consequences; in addition, the questionnaire explored past behaviour, i.e. whether repeat visitors had recommended the provider before. If previous experience can be assumed to be similar to that captured in the survey, this provides a measure of actual behaviour as opposed to mere intentions.

Among the personal information collected, there were gender, age, nationality, country of residence, proficiency at the activity and the motive for doing it.

## **2.2 The sample**

Roughly half of the respondents had participated in more than one activity, often a mix of land-based (mostly hiking) and water-based, in packages ranging from half-day programmes to one-

week camps. Twenty-four per cent had only been kayaking or canoeing. Other important activities included sailing, diving and eco-tours.

Seventy-nine per cent of the participants were tourists and 21 per cent locals; 77.3 per cent had an Irish passport, followed by UK, US and German citizens. Only 17.4 per cent were living abroad at the time of the survey. Almost two thirds were less than 18 years old, and only four per cent of respondents were older than 50.

Overall, the participants in the survey were younger than the general population and the average tourist, and the proportion of Irish nationals was disproportionate. According to the Irish tourism board, 43 per cent of tourists in Ireland and slightly over one third of participants in activities are from overseas (Fáilte Ireland 2013 and 2009). The main reason for these discrepancies is that only *organised* activities, not self-guided hikers etc., were captured by the survey: in the two largest centres included in the sample, holiday camps and adventure camps offered through schools make up a large part of the companies' business. As a consequence, the participants tend to be very young, and those with school adventure programmes are usually living in Ireland. Thirty-five per cent of respondents had come with their school and 50 per cent said they were on holidays. The third largest group of visitors were members of hen or stag parties; the remainder were mostly locals enjoying leisure activities.

The gender mix was more balanced, with 54.3 per cent of the respondents female and 45.7 male. Proficiency varied with the type of activity: whereas overall 46 per cent of respondents considered themselves beginners and less than ten per cent called themselves advanced, all divers had reached at least an intermediate level, with more than half claiming advanced skills.

### **3. Results**

#### **3.1 What tourists want**

##### **3.1.1 Overall importance ratings**

Table 1 shows the values for the six least and the six most important attributes. Though scores ranged from 1 to 5 for all variables, respondents tended to consider all items important, and a rating of 1 was fairly rare. On the other hand, 5 was the most frequent grade for every single item, even the ones with significantly lower average values. The attribute considered most important with an average score of 4.73 was “fun”, whereas “good weather” came in last with 3.64 on average.

It may seem surprising that wind and rain matter so little in outdoor pursuits. Self-selection may play a role here: sun-worshippers would choose a different destination in the first place. In interviews, some visitors also said that lashing rain and gusts of wind felt more adventurous than calm, sunny days. Nationality made only a small difference: even tourists from other source

countries than Ireland and the UK, who may be more used to warmth and sunshine, only rated the importance of good weather 3.75.

Interest in aesthetical attributes tended to be small: staff appearance and a beautiful setting were the second and third most unimportant items. The score for the appearance of the premises was only slightly higher at 4.04, so that overall aesthetical aspects were the least important category. Crowding did not seem to bother the participants in the survey much, either. Interestingly, the degree of individual attention paid to visitors by staff and relaxation were also among the items considered least relevant – but they turned out to be good predictors of recommendations.

**Table 1: Most and least important attributes**

	rank	Average importance rating	Standard Deviation
Fun	1	4.74	.596
Good equipment	2	4.67	.699
Skilled guides	3	4.63	.734
Excitement	4	4.56	.734
Friendly staff	5	4.56	.735
Feeling safe	6	4.55	.789
Relaxation	27	3.97	1.091
Individual attention	28	3.92	1.102
Absence of crowding	29	3.88	1.122
Beautiful setting	30	3.75	1.193
Staff appearance	31	3.74	1.253
Good weather conditions	32	3.64	1.192

Three different types of attributes were at the top of the importance ranking. With an average score of 4.73, fun mattered most to the visitors. Good equipment and skilled instructors were

equally considered very important, followed by excitement, friendly staff and feeling safe. The averages for other hardware-related items - maintenance and cleanness of the equipment, quality of the facilities – were also rather high, making equipment and facilities the most important of the categories in the eyes of the customers. Similarly, good staff also plays a big role in the eyes of adventure tourists. The ratings for two other staff variables – easy communication with the guides and being given enough information – were high, too.

Though emotional outcome items were considered very important by the respondents and fun was at the top of the ranking, their mean importance was below equipment and staff. Of the five adventure-specific attributes, excitement received the highest rating; challenge, a sense of achievement and having experienced something new all ranked somewhere around the middle with scores between 4.27 and 4.33. With an average of 4.0, respondents showed only moderate interest in improving their self-esteem.

Even though adventure tourism is nature-based, visitors were not very concerned about the environment. The eco-friendliness of the activity was rated 4.06, and in the regression analysis, it had no significant effect on customer satisfaction. Appreciation for an unspoilt setting was somewhat higher at 4.31.

Adventure tourists valued good organisation as an attribute rather highly (4.44); however, the category in a slightly broader sense that comprised group size, everything taking place as planned and on time, without waiting times and crowding problems was not considered very important overall.

### **3.1.2 The influence of visitor characteristics and types of activity**

What motivates one type of visitors can be quite different from what a different type of clients wants. Customer preferences can depend on age, gender, nationality and other personal characteristics as well as on the type of activity they pursue. This section looks at the influence of gender, age, motivation (i.e. the occasion on which people participated in adventure activities), nationality, proficiency at the activity, the nature of the activity, country of residence and whether respondents were tourists or locals on the importance ratings for different attributes. The relationship between these variables and the importance of different attributes was explored using linear regression.

#### *Residence and nationality*

Most of the participants in the survey had an Irish passport and were living in Ireland, the others hailed from and lived in roughly 20 countries. While there were a fair number of visitors from the UK and the USA, the numbers of respondents from the other countries rarely exceeded a handful. Consequently, the analysis only differentiated between Ireland and the rest of the world; the dummy variables “residence abroad” and “non-Irish” were used for residence and nationality.

Where people live seems to have a bigger influence on preferences than what passport they own. There were a number of differences between what overseas tourists regarded as important and what mattered most to residents of Ireland. Visitors from abroad paid much more attention to the beauty of the setting, with an average importance rating of 4.15, compared to 3.66 among people living in Ireland. This marked difference was confirmed in multivariate regression. On the other hand, Irish residents found several attributes more important than overseas tourists: facilities, skilled and friendly staff and nearly all of the outcome variables. However, country of residence did not figure as a predictor of the importance in outcome variables in the multivariate regression; differences in self-esteem, achievement and challenge were better explained by other variables. What remained was a much higher preference of people living abroad for a beautiful setting; residents of Ireland, who enjoy similar scenery all year round, attached more importance to good facilities, new skills and three staff factors - skilled and friendly personnel and easy communication with staff.

The analysis also differentiated between domestic and international tourists on the one hand and local residents that had only come for the day on the other. Tourists turned out to value facilities, good maintenance of the equipment and an unspoilt setting more highly than the locals.

Nationality only played a marginal role; the expectations of the Irish living in the UK were closer to those of the English than those of the Irish respondents in most respects. Only one difference in importance ratings could be traced back to nationality: Foreigners cared more about experiencing something new than the Irish.

### *Age*

Of all the visitor characteristics, age was by far the strongest predictor of differences in the importance ratings. However, multivariate regression with age as a metric variable yielded no useful results as there was no linearity with progressing age. Instead, preferences seemed to depend very much on whether participants were minors or adults. Therefore, a dummy variable "adult" for all participants older than 17 years was introduced.

It had a significant influence on the values for 13 out of the 32 items; in each case, adults saw these attributes as more important than children and youths. This was especially pronounced where aesthetical considerations played a role: The appearance of staff and premises and especially the beauty of the setting mattered much more to the adults than to the children. In addition, adult respondents also attached more importance to good and well-maintained equipment, good information, individual attention and relaxation.

### *Gender*

Second only to age, gender also had a significant effect on several variables, but differences tended to be small. Women found most attributes slightly more important than men. For eight of the attributes, the differences were statistically significant, but regression coefficients were fairly small. Thus, women attached somewhat greater importance to the skills of the guides, feeling safe, being well-informed, increasing their self-esteem, enjoying the company of others, group size, a good atmosphere and experiencing something new than men. This generates a coherent picture that conforms to common perceptions of gender roles to some extent: Thus, the higher preference for the first three items, which are all relevant to subjective and objective safety, indicates that women tend to be less risk-prone than men. This is also a frequent result of studies investigating gender differences in risk aversion (Eckel and Grossman 2008). In addition, the higher importance of group size, atmosphere and enjoying the company of the others indicates that women care more about the social environment than men.

### *Proficiency*

Though the importance of the different attributes seems almost identical for all three proficiency levels, regression analysis shows some differences. Beginners tended to be less interested in good company than intermediate and advanced participants; to visitors with advanced skills, quite a few attributes mattered more than to the others: a beautiful setting and staff appearance, feeling well-informed, not having to wait and improving their self-esteem. To some extent this confirms Fluker and Turner's findings that more experienced participants in whitewater rafting are more interested in the "ancillary benefits" (2000:387) while it is quite contrary to Ewert and Hollenhorst's prediction of a stronger taste for challenge, achievement, control and risk-taking as adventurers' skills and commitment increase (1989:128). However, Ewert and Hollenhorst's empirical analysis also had not found much evidence for an influence of skills on motivation.

### *Motivation*

The majority of respondents were either on holidays or with a school group; most others had come with hen or stag parties or were locals enjoying leisure pursuits. The school children only differed from the rest in three respects: For them, it was more important that activities were on schedule, that staff was friendly and that they felt safe. Visitors on holidays also had a stronger desire to feel safe.

### *Type of activity*

The type of adventure had an impact on importance scores for twelve attributes; for all others, it made no difference at all whether people had been sailing, cruising or scuba-diving.

Visitors who had participated in more than one activity differed from the rest in one respect: they found challenge more important than the others. What distinguished kayakers - the second-largest

group - from others was their lower interest in experiencing something new. Rock-climbers showed extremely low interest in group size and staff appearance, but they were a very small group, so results may not be representative. The same applies to horse-riders, who attached far less importance to challenge, improving their self-esteem, new skills and relaxation than others. Equally, only few respondents had only been hiking; they cared little about staff appearance and not having to wait.

Participants in the other three main activities also all had lower values when their importance ratings diverged from those of the rest. Participants in sailing courses were not bothered much by crowding, waiting, staff appearance and group size; they also did not care much about the atmosphere. People on a boat cruise - the least active adventure of all - were seeking less challenge, new skills, sense of achievement and improvement of their self-esteem than the others. In addition, they also attached less importance to a good group size and experiencing something new. Finally, staff appearance for obvious reasons does not matter much at all to divers; they also cared relatively little for individual attention, self-esteem and experiencing something new.

	Multi-activity	Diving	Cruise	Horse-riding	Sailing	Rock-climbing	Hiking	Kayaking
No crowding					-			
No waiting					-		-	
Staff appearance		--			--	--	--	
Individual attention		-						
Challenge	+		-	-				
Achievement			-					
Self-esteem		--	-	--				
New skills			-	--				
Relaxation				--				
Group size			-		-	--		
New experience		-	-					-
Atmosphere					-			

+: positive influence

-: negative influence

--: strongly negative influence

Table 3 shows the influence of the type of activity on importance scores. The probably most important finding is that there were no differences between different types of adventure for any of the attributes that had been identified as most important on average. Thus, the strong preference for fun, good equipment, skilled and friendly instructors, excitement and safety is uniform across all sorts of adventure. This is remarkable as there was a wide range of adventures, from eco-cruises to rock-climbing.

To sum up, some of the personal characteristics of respondents played an important role in the importance they attached to different attributes, while others did not have much influence. Nationality was the least relevant; skills levels and motivation only played a moderate role. Gender differences were clear and significant, but also only moderate. Conversely, age had a strong effect on preferences, affecting a high number of variables and some of them fairly strongly. Though some differences in the importance ratings between different activities were quite pronounced, the assessment of all variables that ranked high in the importance or the satisfaction analysis was astonishingly similar across all types of adventure covered.

### **3.2 Customer satisfaction**

Does what visitors consider important also make them happy? If this is the case, the more important attributes are to the customers, the more they contribute to their satisfaction. In order to test this, a multivariate regression with stepwise addition of variables was run to identify the main determinants of visitor satisfaction. In addition to regression for the full set of variables, exploratory factor analysis and a simple combination of items into category variables, i.e. average scores for groups of attributes that were highly correlated, were tested. The latter provided the best fit.

Several attributes and whole categories turned out to have no direct impact on customer satisfaction and were eliminated. Thus, neither of the environmental variables (unspoilt and unpolluted setting, eco-friendliness) had a significant direct influence on satisfaction; nor did a “suitable setting”. The aesthetical variables (beauty of setting, staff appearance, appearance of premises) did not make much of a difference to visitor happiness either. The third irrelevant category was organisation (activities on schedule, organisation, no waiting, no crowding). These three categories had also ranked lowest in the importance rating. Finally, social environment attributes like enjoying the company of the other people in the group also contributed little to overall satisfaction.

On the other hand, as shown in table 3, equipment (quality of equipment, maintenance of equipment, facilities) and above all outcomes (fun, excitement, challenge, a sense of achievement and improved self-esteem) made a significant difference to the customers, with a somewhat less significant role for staff (skilled instructors, friendly staff, easy communication, individual attention, feeling well informed). Another essential factor in visitor satisfaction was value for



money. The occasion on which visitors had come also mattered: participants in school activities tended to be less happy, whereas clients on holidays were more satisfied.

**Table 3: Determinants of satisfaction**

	Non standardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients	T	Sig.
	Regression coefficient B	Standard error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.559	.203		7.694	.000
Motivation holiday	.108	.043	.092	2.504	.013
Outcomes	.214	.037	.262	5.730	.000
Equipment	.163	.042	.175	3.850	.000
Staff	.104	.050	.097	2.075	.039
Value for money	.188	.035	.252	5.384	.000

Dependent variable: overall satisfaction

Outcomes: fun, excitement, challenge, achievement and self-esteem

R squared: 0.385

Value for money – a construct that considers both quality and price - was strongly influenced by the perceived quality of some attributes, most importantly fun, followed by feeling well informed, acquiring new skills, eco-friendliness of the activity, friendly staff and relaxation. Variation in these underlying determinants explained around half of the variation in value for money (R squared = 0.5). Interestingly, some of these variables such as the eco-friendliness and relaxation had had no significant direct effect on satisfaction.

The results for satisfaction were very similar when the category variables were each replaced by the one component that influenced customer satisfaction most strongly: quality of the equipment, friendly staff and a sense of achievement. Equipment and friendly staff had also ranked high in the importance ratings whereas achievement had found itself in the middle.

Two of the top attributes from the importance survey, safety concerns and skilled instructors, had no significant effect on satisfaction. At first glance the irrelevance of feeling safe during risky activities may be puzzling, especially since the question of risk, safety and thrills is a very central one in adventure tourism (Cater 2006; Dickson and Dolnicar 2004, O'Neill et al. 2000) and it has been found to have an impact on enjoyment in some studies (Tseng et al. 2009). However, in others it was no major motivation (Pomfret 2011). One explanation might be that safety is a secondary attribute (Huang and Sarigöllü (2007) or, according to Kano's classification (Nilsson-Witell and Fundin (2005)), just "must-be quality". A "must-be" attribute leads to dissatisfaction if

a minimum standard is not reached; however, an improvement beyond the necessary level does not increase satisfaction. This might be plausible for safety in an adventure context – if participants are still within their comfort zones, an even higher degree of safety may not increase the quality of the experience. However, even among the subset of 39 participants that felt comparatively unsafe in the Irish sample (scores of 1 to 3), an increased safety level did not contribute to satisfaction. In conclusion, feeling safe did not matter either way to the participants; they did not care for safety, but there was no evidence for risk-seeking either.

To explore the validity of a gap approach, an alternative model was also tested which had importance ratings minus performance ratings as its variables. There was a significant link between these variables and overall satisfaction; however, it was much weaker than in the model that only used performance variables. A regression with the importance – performance values for the four most important variables from the performance regression showed some effect of the gap values for value for money, equipment and achievement on satisfaction; the discrepancy between the importance of staff friendliness and its actual perception had no significant influence on satisfaction at all.

The survey also had space for open comments; 250 participants used it to give additional feedback. By far the most frequent comment was that the respondents had had fun, “craic”, or a great time. Other outcome variables such as challenge and achievement were also well represented among the positive comments. The second category that generated much positive feedback was staff; the friendliness of instructors in particular received praise. On the other hand, equipment and facilities rarely turned up in a positive context, but were responsible for the lion’s share of the negative comments. The second most important source of discontent was bad value for money (often described as not enough time given for the money spent). Comments on aesthetical and environmental aspects, safety, the weather and organisation were rare to non-existent. Thus, the results of the regression analysis are largely confirmed: equipment, staff, outcome and value for money matter – but they matter in different ways. While good staff and enjoyable, challenging activities contribute positively to the customer experience, good equipment and prices do not seem to make the customer’s day; they seem to affect satisfaction most when they fall below a certain expected standard.

### **3.3 Behavioural intentions**

Customer satisfaction is not only a goal per se, but it can also have a large impact on company success. In most studies of the relationship between satisfaction and company performance, it has been shown to increase revenue, market share and ultimately profit (Yee et al., 2011; Anderson et al., 1994; Hallowell, 1996; Bernhardt et al., 2000; Chi and Gursoy, 2009), with just a few surveys that found no or even a negative link (Gursoy and Swanger, 2007; Wiley, 1991).

There are two main channels through which customer satisfaction can affect a company’s success: by generating word of mouth and return visits. Both are crucial for generating business,

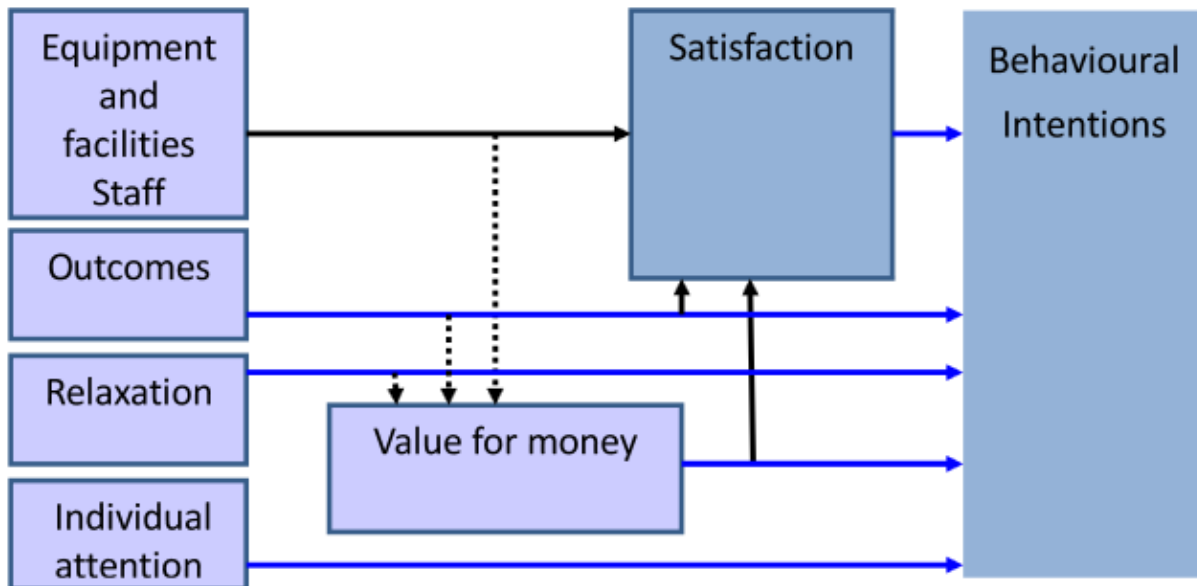
especially in the adventure industry, where many small providers usually neither have the human nor the financial resources for professional promotion of their services. A separate study of adventure providers in the Irish Southwest found that word of mouth was the most important source of new business (Bauer, 2011). Return visits played an even greater role: on average, adventure providers in Kerry said that 43 per cent of their customers had already visited before; the median firm depended on repeat visits for half of its total business (Bauer, 2010).

There is plenty of evidence that satisfaction leads to increased loyalty, to word of mouth promotion and to repeat visits, though the effect is not necessarily linear (Cronin and Taylor, 1992 and 1994; Murray and Howat, 2002; Williams and Soutar, 2009). Some researchers have identified a separate role of image (Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2000; Faullant et al., 2008); others found both indirect and direct effects of performance attributes. Thus, in Tian-Cole et al.'s 2002 study of the visitors of a wildlife refuge, customer satisfaction had the strongest direct effect on behavioural intentions, but quality of performance – “visitors’ perceptions of the attributes of a facility that are controlled by management” (p. 2) – had the highest total impact (p.18). Similarly, according to Chi and Qu (2008), the best model at destination level has both overall satisfaction and attribute satisfaction as determinants of destination loyalty. A third aspect comes into play in Cronin et al. (2000), where value, service quality and satisfaction all have immediate influence on behavioural intentions.

In the Cork and Kerry sample, the influence of satisfaction on how strongly visitors recommended a provider was significant, but not overwhelmingly important. The value for R-squared in a regression that only uses satisfaction as a predictor is 0.264, which means that around a quarter of the variation in intention to recommend is explained by client satisfaction. An analysis including all potential factors yielded a model with a better fit. The version that best predicted how strongly visitors would recommend a provider also had satisfaction as the most important factor (beta = .337), but other variables also contributed significantly. Among them were value for money (.157) and a feeling of achievement (.103), which seem to influence behavioural intentions directly as well as indirectly. Surprisingly, two attributes that had no significant effect on satisfaction also played a role: the degree of individual attention paid to the customer (.200) and relaxation (.096). Participants in school activities (beta = -0.096) were less likely to recommend the providers than the other visitors, who were predominantly on holidays.

Diagram 1 shows the relationships between the variables, which confirm the findings of Cronin et al. (2000): Attributes can have a direct effect on strength of recommendation, but also an indirect one through value for money and satisfaction; interestingly, some only work through either the direct or the indirect channel.

Diagram 1: The relationships between attributes, satisfaction and behavioural intentions



The intention to recommend and actual recommendations may be two different things. To determine whether visitors really act on their behavioural intentions, they were also asked if they had been with a company before, and if yes, whether they had recommended it to others. On the assumption that respondents' satisfaction had not changed dramatically from visit to visit, this gives an indication of the link between satisfaction and actual behaviour. Indeed there was a clear relationship for the subset of repeat visitors: The more satisfied they were (and presumably had been on their previous visit), the more likely they were to have recommended the adventure provider.

Equally, the intention to re-visit is also likely to be a consequence of satisfaction with the company, but there are a few more factors to be considered. It would be expected that it matters whether participants live close to the adventure provider; thus, locals should be more likely than overseas tourists to plan on returning. In addition, adventures that have a stronger sightseeing element like a boat trip to the Skelligs will probably have fewer return customers than activities where the sportive side and the activity as such dominate, for example in sailing.

These predictions could be confirmed to some extent. Again, overall satisfaction is a strong determinant of the intention to revisit, but it only explains some of the variation. Two of the visitor characteristics made a difference: As predicted, locals were more likely to revisit than domestic or international tourists. And as in the analysis of propensity to recommend, visitors enjoying their holidays were considerably more likely to return than participants in school programmes, irrespective of age. In addition, those who had already been with an adventure provider before were more interested in repeating the experience than first-time participants. The

type of activity did not matter much; only sailors were more eager to return than the rest of the respondents, but participants in boat trips were no less likely than kayakers or participants in multi-activity camps to come back.

Value for money was only very weakly significant and thus played a much smaller role for return visits than for recommendations. Only two attributes had a direct and highly significant impact on the propensity to return beyond their effects on value and satisfaction: a sense of achievement and relaxation.

#### **4. Discussion**

The analysis generates a rather complex picture of adventure tourists' preferences and motivations. What visitors consider important does not necessarily satisfy them; what does not seem to contribute much to satisfaction can still inspire them to come back or to recommend a company to their friends. Overall, there appears to be a strong positive role of emotional outcomes, though their ranking depends on the approach: While participants profess to care most about fun, a sense of achievement and other adventure-specific emotions like challenge and excitement contribute most to their satisfaction. The rather unadventurous attribute of relaxation ranks low in importance ratings and does nothing for satisfaction, but it has long-term effects: Visitors may appreciate exciting adventures more, but they would rather repeat, and recommend, relaxing activities where they were given lots of individual attention.

From the results in this survey, adventure providers can safely ignore most aesthetical considerations; visitors seem to care about the functionality of facilities and equipment, but not about looks. Equally, at least in the context of the Irish Southwest, environmental aspects and good organisation do not seem to make much of a difference. Good, above all friendly, staff, is an important positive factor. Last but far from least, the perception of being given value for money contributes strongly to visitor satisfaction and customers' likelihood of generating word of mouth.

These somewhat contradictory results pose an interesting challenge for marketing. The resolution might be to put the emphasis on different aspects in promotion than in product development. So the advertising message might contain elements that ranked high in importance like fun, excitement, skilled, friendly guides and safety. While some of these attributes make frequent appearances in adventure promotion (Swarbrooke et al., 2003: 163-166), other popular promotion promises like small groups and eco-friendliness (ibid.) seem to miss the mark at least with the type of tourist surveyed in Ireland. On the product side, more attention should be paid to those items that increased satisfaction and behavioural intentions such as value for money, good equipment, relaxation and individual attention.

To some extent, providers should also be aware of the differences in preferences between the various demographics. While none of the attributes is considered negative by one group and

positive by others, the extent to which visitors see value in different attributes varies. Thus beautiful scenery may attract adult overseas visitors, but children living in Ireland couldn't care less. Overall, the biggest differences in preferences were found between adults and children or youths, so marketing strategies should very much depend on the typical age of the target group. The type of activity on the other hand seems to play a rather small role, so that even providers of a wide range of adventures can safely adopt a one-message-fits-all approach to marketing its various products.

## 5. Conclusion

The survey identified what adventure tourists want and what makes them satisfied across a number of activities and visitor groups. However, it was conducted in rural Ireland, and the vast majority of the respondents were from Ireland and, less importantly, the United Kingdom. While many of the results seem plausible, it is not clear whether they also apply to different destinations and participants from different source markets. Thus, crowding in sparsely populated Kerry rarely reaches levels that would decrease people's enjoyment of their activities. The picture might be different for other locations, e.g. destinations near population centres like the Bavarian Alps. In addition, the small effect of nationality on preferences might be largely due to the sample, which was heavily dominated by Anglo-Saxon cultures. Therefore, further research in different destinations would be useful to determine to which extent the results from the survey in Ireland universally apply to adventure tourist preferences and satisfaction, and to what extent they are different for different world regions and cultures.

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# **Service with a smile: Deconstructing the experiences of Nepali expedition workers in the Himalaya**

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## **Abstract**

Adventure tourism research in developing countries is well established (Stevens 1993, Goodwin 2003, Nepal 2009, Simkhada, Teijlingen, Regmi and Bhatta 2010) but few studies capture the voice of Nepali workers within the trekking industry to greater understand socio-cultural impacts on mountain regions. The Himalayan Research Expedition (HRE 2011), organised through Carnegie Great Outdoors, part of Leeds Metropolitan University's extensive outdoor programming, provided the perfect vehicle to capture the interface between trekkers and Nepali workers. Approximately 33 Nepali workers were involved in focus groups and interviews and their views of working in the industry sought. Most of the research occurred during the HRE 2011 and difficulties associated with this are highlighted. Three key theories are considered within the underlying theme of the tourist gaze (Urry 2011, Lim 2008). Hall's concepts of the 'postmodern subject', 'othering' and 'west is best', MacCannell's (1973) concept of 'staged authenticity' and Goffman's (1959) 'presentation of self' all gave rise to rich and thick examples of all three concepts drawn from the HRE 2011. Western lifestyles seemed readily adopted by many Nepali workers of status (Surdars, local Sherpa Guides and Climbing Guides) and socio-cultural and environmental concerns were raised by interviewees. Trekkers searching for the untouched, uncommodified life (Moran, in Lim 2008: 3) are juxtaposed with many Nepali workers seeking the very experiences of Western culture from which trekkers are keen to escape. Continuing to protect the lure of the region for trekkers requires careful consideration for all who value this unique experience.

## **Introduction**

In November 2011 Leeds Metropolitan University embarked on a Himalayan Research Expedition (HRE 2011) to the Makalu National Park to climb Mera Peak (6500m) and Baruntse (7200m). It was organised by Carnegie Great Outdoors (CGO) to support PhD work occurring in the School of Sport, part of the Carnegie Faculty of the University. CGO provide a plethora of outdoor opportunities for an array of different client groups. This paper examines the impact of this trekking expedition from the viewpoint of Nepali workers employed to ensure expedition success.

The expedition was arguably the largest of its kind yet to be organised with 37 members in total of whom 30 were involved in scientific research before, during and after the expedition. Its aims were to gather data regarding response rates of participants to acclimatisation. Four pre-expedition exercise regimes were developed: exercise at altitude (simulated 4300m), exercise at near sea level altitude, no exercise at altitude (simulated 4300m) and no exercise at near sea level altitude. Participants underwent rigorous testing before the expedition for two weeks under a planned and assigned exercise regime, during the expedition at altitudes of 3500m, 3800m 4200m and 5200m and immediately after the expedition. The rise in popularity of Himalayan trekking has highlighted altitude related problems and even death through poor acclimatisation (Kayser 1991, Hackett and Roach 2001, Shrestha, Pun and Basnyat 2014). Carefully considering pre-acclimatisation regimes may help considerably in reducing incidents of altitude related illness and death.

The success of this expedition relied on employing approximately “150 Nepali workers as Surdars (co-ordinators), local Sherpa Guides (Nepali workers with excellent local knowledge), Climbing Guides (extraordinary Nepali workers with mountaineering experience some of whom had summited Everest up to nine times), Cooks and Porters” (Interviewee 5). Their employment occurred through a Nepali-based trekking organisation already known to Leeds Metropolitan University.

This paper is not concerned with the outcomes of scientific testing. Such findings will be reported elsewhere. Instead, it seizes the opportunity to investigate the socio-cultural impact of such a large expedition, moving away from the natural science, forming the main HRE 2011 objective and into the socio-culture interface between expedition members and Nepali support workers and others involved in trek tourism. A qualitative approach to data collection was adopted. Wide ranging articles are available addressing issues of tourism impact in trekking regions (Stevens 1993, Nepal 2000, 2005, 2007, 2009, Goodwin 2003, Simkhada, Teijlingen, Regmi and Bhatta 2010) but few try to capture the views and thoughts of Nepali people living and working in the region, although this number is growing (Simkhada et al 2010). The paper will share views of Nepali people in the Everest trekking region and of those servicing the HRE 2011 to highlight examples of socio-cultural impacts. This was particularly pertinent given the expedition’s size.

Lim (2008: 3) suggests tourism “entails seeking out and enjoying sights that are usually outside one’s ordinary social and cultural experience, and the gaze is the key means for enjoyment which a tourist employs upon arrival at any particular desired destination”. Trekking as a tourism activity quintessentially embodies this experience. It is predominantly a Western pursuit growing in popularity (Mintel 2010a, Mintel 2010b). Nepal promises unprecedented scenery and a unique cultural experience for the tourist, particularly for those willing to make the effort to trek into the country’s wilder places. Lim (2008: 3) neatly encapsulates this constructed expectation:

When the private enterprises and tourism authorities both utilise the same tourism marketing strategy, the fate of Nepal as an ‘exotic’ tourist destination is more or less sealed. Of course, this exoticisation of Nepal is nothing new, and has received the attention of numerous commentators. For example, Peter Moran notes in *Buddhism Observed* that Nepal has been central to Western fantasies of ‘untouched, uncommodified life, where one can encounter people who “live in pure culture”’.

It is difficult to sustain exoticism while managing large numbers of tourists. There were over half a million tourist arrivals in Nepal in 2010 (Kruk et al 2011, Khatri 2010) and their expenditure was responsible for 7.9% of Gross Domestic Product (Kruk et al 2011: 55). Not all visits to Nepal involve trekking. However, at 21% of the total it represents a significant number of tourists visiting fragile environmental and cultural areas of the country (ibid).

This ethnographic study was fuelled through Lim’s (2008) mindfulness of an over-reliance on Urry’s (2011 [1990]) work on the tourist gaze and his reminder that while tourists gaze at hosts during their visit the hosts also have preconceived ideas of the tourist and their worlds:

While Urry’s concept of the ‘tourist gaze’ is a useful tool for understanding tourism practice, we must guard against over-visualisation of tourism analysis by paying attention to what Coleman and Crang call the performativity of tourism, that is, the concrete interactions between the tourists and host communities that consist of a constant negotiation of spatial meanings (Coleman and Crang 2004) (Lim 2008: 4).

It is the importance of the negotiation of spatial meaning that is sometimes lost in considering the construction of tourist destinations. It is easy to forget that while tourists and the industry construct visualisations of places the hosts are often mirroring these actions and developing constructions of visitors, their backgrounds and their expectations; what Lim (2008) refers to as the ‘counter-gaze’. This paper uses the HRE 2011 to ethnographically explore the concept of the counter gaze and uses three other important theoretical lenses to critically evaluate the service roles of Nepali trek workers.

### **Theoretical concepts**

This study had a number of theoretical drivers. It follows an already published theoretical paper (Lim 2008) and develops important interlinking concepts: Goffman’s presentation of self (Goffman 1959) is linked strongly with authenticity (Boorstin 1961) and staged authenticity (MacCannell 1973). Stuart Hall’s (1992) work on ‘identity’ and ‘othering’ is instrumental in understanding socio-cultural views of ‘hosts and guests’ (Smith and Brent 2001) and is the start of this theoretical underpinning. Hall’s (1992a, 1992b) work considers how concepts of identity have changed over time. Importantly, three concepts of identity are recognised. The Middle Ages gave rise to the ‘enlightenment subject’ where ‘man’ was at the centre of created identity. Later, recognition of the importance of significant others; co-workers and role models gave birth to the

‘sociological subject’. However, the ‘post-modern subject’ considers the importance of other outside influences shaping the identity of individuals; media sources, internet and Western influences, the all pervasiveness of capitalism and global interconnectedness. The ‘post-modern subject’ is particularly important when considering the scale of global interconnectedness and its impact on remote areas such as the Everest trekking region. Cultural markers, while still of absolute importance in shaping identity, are tempered and influenced by global markers both virtually and in reality as predominantly Western trekkers visit the regions. The socio-cultural impact in such areas is not solely limited to visitors to the area. Hall’s concept of the ‘post-modern subject’ is increasingly important in understanding the shapers of individual and collective identity in trekking regions and the size of the HRE 2011 is a consideration when focusing on socio-economic impacts in the region.

Using the many ‘portals’ through which Western life may be viewed a distorted image of Western culture and style and what it means to be Western occurs. While Urry’s (2011) concept of the tourist gaze is familiar, less developed, but becoming increasingly important, is how those serving tourists at the destination view visitors. This is an important concept within this paper. Lim (2008: 1) makes a brave attempt at “a simultaneous analysis of the shifting images visitors and hosts have of each other”. It is an important theme developed by Hall (1992b) who uses the term ‘othering’ to provide insight into how people in developing countries view the West (referred to by Urry (2011) and Mowforth and Munt (2009) as the outward gaze) as well as how they view their own society and culture being the inward gaze. Interestingly, to an extent, this also becomes a counter gaze as the reflected attitudes of the West mingle and shape formed attitudes from developing countries. Nations really do believe the perceptions of others in forming collective identity, particularly within developing countries. Hall (1992b) uses two oppositional positions calling these The West and the Rest. Table 1 considers perceptions of the West and developing countries representing the homogenised ‘othering’ of post-modern cultural identity.

<b>The West</b>	<b>Outward Gaze on the West</b>
Democratic	Cool
Free	Hip
Developed	Where it’s at
Civilised	All embracing
Ordered	What everyone’s doing
Peaceful	Superior – it must be better

Table 1: Perceptions of the West. Adapted from Hall (1992b).

Table 2 provides the antithesis to table 1 where collective perceptions of developing countries, or to use Hall's (1992b) phrase 'The Rest' are expressed more generally from collective accepted expression and reinforced and internalised by those nations within developing countries.

<b>The Rest</b>	<b>Inward Gaze on the Rest</b>
Despotic	Embarrassed
Undeveloped	Apologetic
Violent	Poor (materially)
Barbaric	In need of help – (to develop)
Fundamentalist	

Table 2: Perceptions of the Rest. Adapted from Hall (1992b).

Hall's (1992, 1992b) work sets the scene for a study that probes such fundamental notions of 'othering' between 'the West and the Rest'. Such concepts are underpinned by a post-modern collective identity influenced not just by cultural markers but global markers driven by Western ideology. Internet, media and global interconnectedness all contribute to the 'othering' of nations.

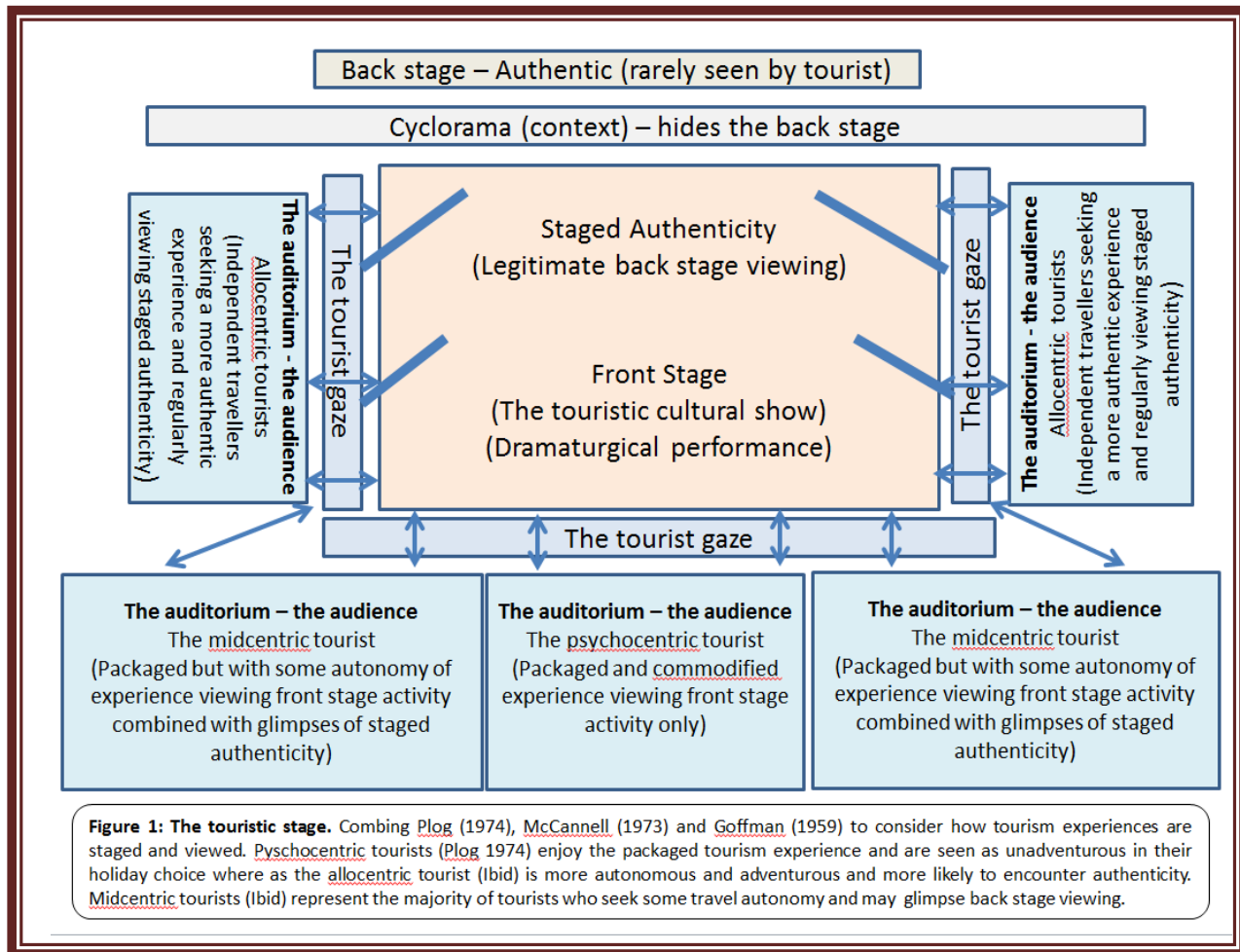
How people act and react during every day social encounters has been considered by many theorists (Goffman 1959, Hall 1992, 1992b, MacCannell 1973, 2008, Mowforth and Munt 2009). Drawing on seminal work by Goffman's (1959) 'presentation of self in everyday life' the importance of every day encounters and the way individuals manage these is highlighted. Goffman openly criticises his own attempts to understand how people present themselves in everyday life. As the central tenet of his work he sees social interaction as a staged event; a dramaturgical activity "presenting things that are make belief" (Goffman: 1959: xi). Encounters with others are acted out on the social stage and its actors share information allowing each to build a persona of the other. How true to the 'real persona' this might be depends largely on circumstance and context of the social encounter. Goffman reminds us that such 'impression management' is almost always manufactured to allow a positive persona to be displayed to the other. MacCannell (1973) sees the dramaturgical enactments of these encounters where real life is buried behind a façade of self-presentation as the perfect back drop to understanding touristic encounters more fully. Thus, in accepting that the majority of these encounters are staged events, MacCannell's (1973, 1976) concept of "staged authenticity" (1973) is an important consideration.

Hillman (2013), in reviewing concepts and definitions of authenticity, suggests that "objective authenticity can be defined as an experience which genuinely samples the culture of the other, that is, of the host society and the host people" (Hillman 2013: 2). Given the foundation of MacCannell's (1973) work such a definition is problematic. He explains the difficulty of true



authentic contact with the ‘host societies and host people’ suggesting even the ‘back stages’ or hidden areas such as kitchens, offices, work conditions and so on are often subject to ‘staged authenticity’. Many touristic experiences are extended beyond the ‘front stage’ to include apparently ‘back stage’ activity rigged to simulate a more authentic touristic experience. MacCannell’s (1973) concepts of ‘staged authenticity’ are therefore far more complex than the simplistic notion of the front stage (viewed by tourists) and the back stage (hidden from tourists), a point laboured heavily in his 2008 critical evaluation of Bruner’s (2005) interpretation of his work in the book *Culture on Tour*. MacCannell (2008) is at pains to refute the notion proposed by Bruner (2005) that his work simply recognises a series of binary oppositions of which the concepts of front and back stage are classic examples. He initially purposefully situates “staged authenticity” between the front and back stage arenas “to name a new kind of space that could not be assimilated into either one of the original pair” (MacCannell 2008: 335). This precisely is ‘staged authenticity’, that moment when the tourist firmly believes they really have glimpsed the real world of the host society or host people, yet in reality, this may not be the case. Tourists are often cleverly duped into believing they have “genuinely sample[d] the culture of the other” (Hillman 2013: 2) when in fact this is rarely the case.

Three important theoretical distinctions are now in place: First, Hall (1992a) suggests identity to be considerably influenced by global interactions through the ‘post-modern subject’ allowing us to construct our own, others and indeed a whole nation’s identity. From these constructions come the concept of the West and the Rest as two idealised ways of presenting developed and developing countries (Hall 1992b) and, in turn, this allows the consideration of the outward and inward gaze. The interactions emanating from the gaze are two-way, allowing “constant negotiations of spatial meaning” (Lim 2008: 4) between host and guest (Smith and Brent 2001). Second, Goffman suggests that all human interactions are in fact only dramaturgical events showing each ‘player’ positively and such interactions are unlikely to show the true identity of individuals involved. Third, are the enactments in which glimpses of ‘true’ cultural experiences occur, although MacCannell (1973) refers to these as ‘staged authenticity’. This is far more complex than the simple binary of front stage (viewed by the tourist) and back stage (hidden from the tourists), as more back stage activity becomes legitimate viewing and thus packaged accordingly. The tourist theatre (figure 1) provides a diagrammatic representation of theories discussed using the theatre as a way of depicting theoretical development. Plog’s (1974) tourist categorisation of psychocentric, midcentric and allocentric has been used for the theatre auditorium. Its classic bell shaped distribution curve depicting midcentric tourists as the greater number is seen through the seating capacity but attention must also be paid to the seating positions and the stage views these afford. I have taken time to develop the concept of ‘staged authenticity’ to ensure it is understood before applying it to examples from the HRE 2011. It also requires distinction from the work of Goffman’s ‘impression management’ firmly rooted in ‘front stage’ operations, yet it is important to understand the interlinking nature of such concepts. Again, conceptual distinctions will become clearer as examples are given.



## Methodology

This study was evaluative in nature. It sought to highlight socio-cultural impacts of the HRE 2011 and trekking more generally, through ensuring the voice of Nepali workers was heard. Simkhada et al (2010), in their study of sexual health knowledge, sexual relationships and condom use among male Nepali trekking guides, found frank and honest discussions difficult on this topic. In this study less sensitive issues were tackled yet Nepali workers were still being asked for opinions on work conditions, their employment roles and other sensitive issues such as the impact of their work on family life, relationships and routine more generally. As an active member of the HRE 2011 team the researcher was not best placed to conduct such a study, however, this was the scenario presented. It was very difficult to ascertain how truthful responses were based upon the researcher scenario given. For example, Nepali participants may have felt a favourable response to questioning would lead to more work in the future. Conversely, perceptions that a less favourable response, or indeed unwillingness to be involved in the

research, could lead to being prematurely dismissed from the expedition were also a possibility. Although such issues were addressed within the participant information presentation to all workers it was very difficult to ascertain whether this important point was understood by everyone. At the beginning of each interview and focus group recorded verbal consent of all participants occurred. The researcher being an active member of the HRE 2011 team, although a considerable drawback, did allow access to a purposive sample of Nepali workers as well as participant observation opportunities over a three week period.

The position of participant observer was adopted for the duration of the three week expedition. Diary work and MP3 recordings throughout the expedition were used for all observations. Openness and honesty from the researcher occurred at the outset with all 37 HRE 2011 UK members aware of and consenting to the observation activity. It was made clear to UK members that the primary focus of attention would be to observe interactions and elicit views from Nepali workers because UK members had already consented to a busy scientific research schedule. However, inevitably observation of interactions would involve UK and Nepali members. Many of the 150 Nepali workers involved in the HRE 2011 were addressed collectively at Lukla at the beginning of the trek. A member of the trekking organisation acted as interpreter and a short talk of approximately 12 minutes was delivered explaining the research. Two important points were emphasised: observations would take place while trekking together and volunteers would be required for discussion during the expedition. This also gave a chance to welcome the Nepali workers to the HRE 2011.

Initially individual interviews were conducted but this approach failed to elicit fluid and open discussion. Each question was asked through an interpreter and responses followed the same process. Participants felt intimidated and were reluctant to engage. Discussions took place with the trekking company staff and other academics and researchers on the HRE 2011 and a different approach was adopted. Initial interviews acted as valuable piloting experience. These data were not included in study results. The initial pilot consisted of three individual interviews. It was decided that where Nepali workers were fluent in English (for example trekking company staff) individual semi-structured interviews would continue to be conducted. For other workers focus groups of up to five people occurred allowing participants to address questions through group discussion. This worked well, although over reliance on the interpreter providing only the essence of what was discussed was a serious flaw in data analysis. After each focus group lengthy discussions occurred with the interpreter and key issues concerning socio-cultural impacts and evaluative data were highlighted. Capturing the essence of discussion from focus groups and relaying information from key informants using a grounded theory approach were the prime objectives of the data collection tools.

In addition to the Nepali workers involved in the HRE 2011, key informants were also interviewed. In total interviews with six key informants occurred including trek leaders from the UK and Nepal and owners of tourist outlets such as tea houses and cafés. Seven focus groups

occurred with approximately 27 Nepali workers contributing to these from across the expedition working roles (Surdars, Local Sherpa Guides, Climbing Guides, Cooks and Porters). Interviews and focus group duration ranged from 20 to 50 minutes in length. All interviews and focus groups were MP3 recorded and then transcribed in Microsoft Word. However, focus group recordings were only transcribed through the interpreter, therefore missing vital discussion points between Nepali members.

Working at altitude was particularly challenging. Specialist IT equipment was required for such work and this was not available to the researcher due to budgetary constraints. Therefore, transcriptions of interviews and focus groups occurred sometime after the expedition making clarification of discussion issues in recordings after each interview and focus group difficult. Verbatim transcripts of all focus groups would have significantly increased the richness of data but required specialist interpreters and funding. This did not occur. Ethical approval for this study was granted through the Leeds Metropolitan University's Ethics Committee. I am indebted to the Nepali trek workers and company directors for giving valuable time to this project on top of such long working hours.

## **Results and discussion**

### *The post-modern subject*

Hall's theme of the post-modern constructed subject or identity was resonant at all junctures of the trek. Having visited Nepal a number of times for trekking and climbing purposes in the past stark observations occurred between 2011 and my last visit in 2001. Singularly the most important influence was mobile phones. Trekkers were able to talk to family on many parts of the journey. Interconnectedness remained despite being in a remote area of the Himalaya. Many Nepali workers, particularly in the more responsible roles (Surdars, Mountain Guides and Local Sherpa Guides), owned mobile phones. On a number of occasions on acclimatisation treks I would hear conversations in Nepali and expect to find a group of people on the next section of the track. Instead I came across one Nepali in conversation on their mobile. This somehow seemed incongruous with the surroundings but acted as an important reminder that this beautiful environment was in fact a lived-in space where local people work and raise their families.

Internet access and the proliferation of the World Wide Web were ever prominent. Major centres such as Lukla were well equipped with internet access sites and all seemed well patronised. Trekkers with mobile internet devices remain connected to the internet providing a strange juxtaposition of connectedness within disconnected locations along the trek. It seemed surreal to be able to receive and send e-mails; to provide instant images of wild places for your Facebook community who would receive such communications in the comfort of their living rooms. And, while this was predominantly a trekker's activity, it emphasises the way in which a persona came to be built using images from what, for some, may be a trip of a lifetime. The images sent do not depict day to day existence yet will be used to ensure a positive on-line personal image occurs.

Such connectedness is available to all, trekkers and Nepali's alike and this is broadening the horizons of indigenous mountain people. In an interview with a key well-educated and travelled Nepali informant, both positive and negative issues of interconnectedness were highlighted:

When I was young I could not dream because I had never seen the world; we had never heard of the world. And now people have seen the world through the TV, on the computer. Now it is only 2 or 3 years since I have started using the computer and I still am unable to use it properly but my granddaughter is only 16 months old and is already pressing the buttons on the mobile phone and saying hello, hello! So Nepali people are looking for more and more. In one way it is very good but in another way it is not so good because for a long time no one had anything and we were happy. We never knew what was going on in the world; we never heard any news, no TV, no phone nothing. We didn't have these things and we were happy. We didn't hear anything. We were blind to the world. But now we hear all about what is happening in America, what is happening in the UK. We can hear what is happening in Canada and that makes us very distressed in other ways (Interviewee 1).

The globalised nature of post-modern living knows no bounds. The tendrils of technological twenty-first century living extend to all but the most remote of places. It shows people how others live and fuels the inward and outward gaze. It brings with it worries, concerns and stresses about how nations live their lives. Interestingly, the interviewee is trying to embrace technology and, through their grandchild, recognises the inevitability of the encroachment of the modern world into mountain communities. It is often the less obvious that combine with change more generally to produce other issues of concern in mountain regions, as explained below:

Change is an accepted thing. It comes with tourism. But other changes we don't see so readily are happening. People are now moving in and out of the villages. Some are going abroad, the amount of knowledge people have about the world and other people is vast. Most of the people who move abroad are well educated. This is a problem because those who can effect change in the area are the very people who move away (Interviewee 2).

It is easy to consider visual, physical and structural changes occurring without necessarily realising more subtle changes are also problematic and have a considerable effect on the way in which people live their lives. Interviewee 3 comments specifically on the changes recently seen in Lukla as a direct result of the trekking industry:

Even five or six years ago Lukla was not like this. Having the hospital built has made a difference because people come to use the hospital. But also the number of lodges and tea houses has increased dramatically (Interviewee 3).

But more hidden changes are also occurring. The globalised nature of living and the insight into the lives of others can, in itself, be hugely unsettling for a people who often see their culture and

lifestyle as inferior to the way in which people are able to live in the West. Of grave concern to Interviewee 1 is the impact upon indigenous culture through the all-pervasive Western contact. While nature remains largely resistant to the growing number of trekkers visiting the region, Nepali culture is far more fragile:

In my generation people are quite concerned about our culture. Our dress, our customs. But people are becoming educated; some in Kathmandu, some in Australia, Canada and they might bring the Western Culture back but I hope they won't forget our culture; to preserve it and share it with people. And also the mountains. We have Everest and Cho-O-yu. We have the most beautiful mountains in the world so at least we cannot change the mountains. Nobody can change the mountains. In the future what worries me is that we might lose our culture through the younger generation (Interviewee 1).

Daily routines for families during the trekking season are severely disrupted. It becomes difficult for those going away on long treks. In Focus Group 7 one man openly admitted being “home sick a lot when I am away. I want to be with my family but I am miles away”. And those left to continue the family routine worry about their loved ones and find chores more of a burden. In Focus Group 7 a woman commented “much of the time I worry about my husband because it is a dangerous job but also there are so many chores that need to be done at the tea house and these do not go away”. In season, trek work is demanding, hours are long and long periods of time can be spent away from the village and family. But this is not always an obvious thought for Westerners enjoying their experience. In Focus Group 7 one man suggested “there are two important issues – earning money and, therefore, being able to stay in places with the family”. The two are inextricably entwined and he goes on to say “while it is possible to earn more money abroad it does mean you are away for long periods and this affects the family considerably, so I prefer to have less money but stay in the region and be able to spend more time with my family”. Inevitably family and relationships are of the utmost importance.

#### *West is best and othering*

Hall's (1992b) notion of ‘othering’ is seen in the dress codes of many Nepali's living in the mountains. Younger Nepali's often sport jeans, t-shirts, puffer jackets, branded eye wear and baseball caps. Ironically, many of the clothes worn will be copied products made within Nepal and providing another perspective on the notion of ‘staged authenticity’. Interviewee 3 comments directly about how Western style is becoming more pervasive.

But having the Westerners coming to Nepal is one of the main benefits for us. You can be a porter and then become a guide and they earn money from this. And then people do change their clothes style, they dress like Westerners and it looks like a fashion show (Interviewee 3).

In many experienced Nepali mountain workers as well as Western trekkers the embodiment of the mountaineer can be seen; tanned and clad from head to toe with labelled mountain clothing

and equipment. Such images will fuel their on-line persona and build dramaturgically the presence they wish to portray to others. For many, just as in the West, this will never be a true depiction of how they live their lives.

There seems to be an acceptance of Western ways of living, almost without question, as being the way forward. The overall feeling through observation is that if it comes from outside the indigenous culture then it has to be better. Through contact with Westerners outward migration is becoming an issue as Nepali's seek the Western way of living either in cities or further a field in other countries. Interviewee 1 comments:

In those days they didn't have any opportunity to gain anything you know. They were happy with how they were but now people have seen everything they want more and more and more and more. I talked to one of my colleagues and he said I work very hard but still my father wants me to work harder. I said to him this is the thousand Buddha's time you know. We say everyone wants more and more and more and they are never satisfied. So this is what we say. So, if you are not satisfied you are not happy. And this is the human way. It's not the Western way it's the human way (Interviewee 1).

Global connectedness through the World Wide Web allows the viewing of cultural depictions and the lives of others to be viewed. But often these are only depictions and it is very easy to gain false impressions of whole nations through on-line postings. This is theoretically problematic because compartmentalisation tends not to consider theory interaction. For example, Nepali workers may well be enticed away from Nepal because of the 'front stage' depictions of what might be offered in other countries. Just as individuals wish to ensure a positive on-line persona for anyone with whom they have contact, so too do companies, cities and whole nations. All three important theoretical strands can be seen working together, spinning a web of deceit into which unsuspecting workers may stumble. The more vulnerable workers are those with most to gain and these gains are usually measured materially and economically.

### *Staged authenticity*

For many Nepali workers in the trekking industry there is only a four to six month period to earn as much money as possible to support the family for the rest of the year. Supporting the family often includes an extended family for which the worker may also be financially responsible. But, because Nepali workers are often highly organised teams of experienced workers, trekkers may have little idea of the long hours and considerable effort expended to ensure a high level of service delivery. Everything seemingly runs like clockwork. Here, cooks discuss their daily routine and provide insight into team working:

In the morning we wake at 4 a.m. and then begin boiling water. It takes three hours to do all this. Breakfast is at 7 so we must be up early to boil the water and begin cooking. If a hot lunch is prepared during the day, sometimes this happens, then it will take 2 hours to

do this. Normally soup and hot drinks but it still takes 2 hours. Then evening meal, again, is 3 hours preparation. We do the same in the evening. If the teamwork is good then it is not too hard but sometimes people come from different areas and it takes time to build a team and get into a routine and then it becomes more difficult. Often the cook team will come from the same village. Our village is below Lukla. We are neighbours and work together. It takes 1½ hours to walk to my neighbour's house (Cooks - Focus Group 1).

On the face of it this reveals an eight-hour cooking day but this is a static activity in camp and does not consider dismantling the kitchen and dining shelters daily, walking the same distance as trekkers and reconstructing facilities at the next campsite. For many Western trekkers the trek itself represents the main activity of the day. To incorporate this daily activity into their working routine results in an incredibly long and arduous working day. All cooking equipment, food, fuel and tents are carried by the team and they must somehow leap frog the trekkers to ensure lunchtime and evening meals are served on time. Often when trekkers arrive at camp tea and biscuits are already available. Carrying loads of at least 25kgs they must ensure a journey time of half that of the trekkers for the same distance covered and their day may well be in excess of 16 hours for every day of the three week trek. Different roles are assigned to the team depending on experience and there is a distinct hierarchy within all trekking support work performed by Nepali workers:

There are 13 of us in the cooking team. It is my job to coordinate the efforts of all those people and divide the jobs up. We need to consider who is carrying kerosene, food, the kitchen, dining room and how all this is set up. We have to do everything between us and we carry everything from one area to the next (Cooks – Focus Group 1).

Much of this effort can be viewed as 'back stage' work. Trekkers appreciated the high standard of food served; everything from Dal-bat to pizza, yet the efforts of the team were only truly considered and understood by trekkers with experience and insight. Bed tea would arrive at 6 a.m. as if by magic with little thought as to how long the cooks had been working beforehand and how much they had to do during the day. Just as research in the field is logistically problematic, so too is actually serving the trekkers and always ensuring high standards. Again, the complicated nature of ensuring 37 Western trekkers receive a good meal at 19.00 hours each day of the trek is not something fully grasped by many clients. In focus group 3, articulating the complexities of one day's trekking covering all possible eventualities is expressed and this reveals the highly skilled and experienced nature of the coordinating roles required to ensure service delivery:

All staff are very experienced. But they are not classified as a cook because you need to be in the role for five or six years before becoming a cook. We split the meals so that if there is ever a problem with porters not arriving we can still cook and make sure everyone can have a meal. So we split the cook staff down. We have people carrying food then we have people carrying stoves and kerosene separate to the food, always separate. So these



guys have less responsibility and they may end up going with the cook and the kitchen boy. But we have to be careful here. The stoves have to go the same time as the cooks and the food. So the stove or kerosene boys are of lower importance and this is their job. The two kerosene boys carry the stoves and kerosene and their own equipment. And again we always make sure, even if the other kerosene boys do not arrive, we always have stoves. One day's worth of kerosene is always up front so we can cook, just in case anything goes wrong (Mixed group - Focus Group 3).

The 'behind the scenes' work becomes even more complicated when all other facets of the trek are also considered. Eating good food on the trek is incredibly important but only one element to be considered by the trekking organisation. Camping, accommodation, climbing and within the HRE 2011 the research elements all have to be blended into the mix. Here Interviewee 2 discusses other aspects of the service requirements:

Looking at the loading, the weight, the carrying and ensuring the logistics all work is an important business. Logistics are important. We have to put the names down for all the porters and then we have to make sure all are going and getting to places safely. Then we have the porters that have to come back. After six days we have three porters coming back and after ten days another three porters and so on. It is all worked out with where people live and how much time they can spend on the trek (Interviewee 2).

All this frenetic 'back stage' activity of which trekkers may be more or less aware, depending on experience, is necessary for the smooth running of expeditions and the Nepali workers are viewed by others always within the context of trekking. However, because of the close proximity between workers and trekkers, glimpses of 'back stage' activity frequently occur. For example, in discussion with the Cooks during Focus Group 1 one cook commented "I like to be with people who will talk with you and you feel comfortable with the people around you. Little things are important like leaders going to the kitchen and thanking you for the food". Such discussions may elicit sharing of work routines and insight into the working day. This may therefore more realistically represent 'staged authenticity' or MacCannell's (1973) middle ground between the front and back stages, the *real* back stage being the real lives of workers away from the trekking industry. Here, porters (Focus Group 2) provide insight into life away from work:

We are often friends or related to one another. Our village is not a tourist village and although living in the Everest region some of us have to walk at least three days to seek work in Lukla which acts as a hub for all trekking organisations.[...]. We want to be able to provide an education for our children, something we have not had, and we are hopeful that tourism will supply the opportunity to do this through the money we earn. It not only means our children can have food and clothes, but also pens and paper so they can study at school (Porters – Focus Group 2).

Through such information, sharing glimpses into the real back stage, inaccessible authentic lives of Nepali workers occur. Even those running the trekking company also spend a proportion of their time in their home village:

People visit my area now and there is more money in the region. Compared to government wages trekking is well paid but it is seasonal and it does cover only 6 months of the year. Most of the other 6 months is spent on the land. We still live off the land and few in my area are business people. They still live off the land. When I am not working I do go back to my region and work on the land (Interviewee 2).

There are instances of trekkers visiting the villages of workers and providing assistance for a better standard of living. Interviewee 2 reports that with money raised from trekking “we are also trying to build a school in the region so I am working hard on this too”. Porters also allude to schemes that may help support the wider village community. “I have been trekking with tourists and working since I was 12 years old. There is support from some tourists in the form of clothes, money, sponsorship and so on” (Porters – Focus Group 2). Generally, the subsistence agricultural life, forming the mainstay for Nepali trek workers, remains segregated from their daily work routine. This is no different to other occupations, except that there may be huge disparity between work and home life, with the latter often consisting of a hand to mouth existence for whole extended families relying on wages from trek workers. Again, such disparity is often hidden from view because many trekkers never stray away from the main tourist mountain routes and their lived experience of the region is the supporting tourist infrastructure specifically catering for Western trekkers rather than the authentic villages away from tourist areas. But the money from trekking does help sustain village life for those whose family members are working in the trekking industry. This is considered in Focus Group 4.

It is about the money first, but I like to serve the foreign people who come to see the mountains. This is important as well. It’s part of our duty. We serve them and they pay us so it’s a win win situation for us. Tourism is a good thing. The major reason is to earn money and therefore sustain local villages. But there is also a coming together of the family because money is earned in the tourist season and this allows the family to stay together during the off season. It is economically sustaining for the rest of the year (Mixed - Focus Group 4).

This focus group highlighted once again the importance of family and village life. The dramaturgical act being immersed into a sixteen hour day trekking activity for long periods occurs to allow more time with the family at other times of the year. There were numerous reports of the enjoyment such work provides, particularly positive contact with interesting people but workers always commented on the importance of time with loved ones and were acutely aware of being able to sustain their ‘authentic’ *real* life away from trekking once the season is over.

## Conclusions

This paper has used three important theories as lenses to critically evaluate the socio-cultural interactions of the HRE 2011. First, it recognised the all pervasiveness of global interconnectedness and Hall's (1992b) post-modern subject. There seems no escaping the proliferation of the World Wide Web and with it the inevitable cultural drive towards Western capitalism. The study has highlighted the complex nature of the depictions of people and places through this medium and this in turn encroaches on the dramaturgical ways we present ourselves both on and off-line.

Through the voice of Nepali trek workers this study has depicted the tourist gaze as a two-way process where opinions of both 'hosts and guests' (Smith and Brent 2001) are formulated (Urry 2011 [1990], Lim 2008). It has provided examples of 'othering' (Hall 1992a, 1992b), with an underlying premise that unquestionably West is best, and this is further fuelled through the World Wide Web and global interconnectedness. Finally, 'staged authenticity' has been discussed in the context of the HRE 2011 itself and extended to consider the 'real' lives of Nepali workers away from the trekking industry. The juxtaposition here is the importance of the well-paid (locally) trek work (the staged authenticity of life at work) sustaining the real lives of whole families who still live a predominantly subsistence lifestyle in rural mountain communities.

Motivations for visiting mountain regions of Nepal are the beauty of the environment and the cultural experiences associated with physical and emotional journeying in such incredible landscapes (Lim 2008). Here lies the greatest juxtaposition of all in terms of understanding authentic touristic mountain experiences. While many Nepali trek workers seem to seek the monetary and materialist gains of paid employment in tourism and embrace Western ideology and lifestyle, Western trekkers seek the "untouched, uncommodified life, where one can encounter people who "live in pure culture"" (Moran, in Lim 2008: 3). In seeking the true 'authentic' pure culture living in the mountains so close to nature may afford, trekkers espouse a more attractive materialistic way of living for Nepali people who seem to embrace this more materialistic and apparently sheik lifestyle. Trekkers seem magnetically drawn to the pure Nepali mountain culture only to find Nepali people seeking the very experiences from which Western trekkers are eager to escape. While Interviewee 1 is steadfast in the unspoilt beauty of the mountains that are the Everest region, cultural concerns remain and the same old conundrum is seen where tourism continues to erode the very core of its attractiveness.

The region is changing, even the mountains are changing through global warming, a Western phenomenon, but it is difficult to project a scenario in the foreseeable future where Nepali mountain regions and their unique cultural experiences will not be attractive to tourists. How this is managed and the way in which both environment and culture are protected are both topics requiring close scrutiny in the coming years and are of great concern for those with insight in the

region. Interviewee 1 provides an important reminder that all resources are finite yet understanding their limits is far from an exact science.

If I could use a crystal ball I can just see things going on and on and on. I can see no end. But I do see boundaries and if you step beyond those boundaries you will always fall down. It's this more and more and more that seems a problem. I have no idea how far it can all go. It can fall at any time. It can go a little bit further but nobody knows (Interviewee 1).

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# **The challenges of social inclusion in outdoor education: Can tortoise and hare learn together?**

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## **Abstract:**

This paper makes use of Aesop's Fable, the Tortoise and the Hare, to explore how we can facilitate outdoor learning in a way that helps to develop connections with nature. For many, especially young people and those experiencing physical and/or mental ill health, stepping outside into a natural environment can be a real challenge. Some of the themes explored:

- Potential barriers to participation - when Doing gets in the way of Being in nature
- The role of the facilitator in fostering comfort rather than initiating concern (distress)
- The use of stories within outdoor education to foster familiarity, comfort and connections.

**Key words:** young people; stories; nature; comfort; adventure.

## **Introduction**

I'm a Doctoral Researcher at the University of Cumbria, researching into the relationship that young people have with the natural environment. Within my research I am concentrating on the voice of young people: what they think about nature, what they enjoy doing outdoors, how 'connected' do they feel, and does this impact on their perception of their health and well-being or on their desire to look after natural spaces. As you read this paper, I invite you to take a couple of minutes to think about the adventures you had outdoors as a child/young person. Where did you go? What did you do? Who was with you? What was your inspiration for doing this – why did you go outside? If you want, note down your thoughts or turn to someone near you and share your story with them.

My practical experiences as an environmental youth worker and as a trainer of youth and community workers, together with my academic research, have highlighted the importance in some situations of generating a relaxed, gentle atmosphere that encourages sharing of thoughts. Many people feel intimidated by those who lead more adventurous outdoor lives than them: we need to be mindful that for them the words 'an adventure outside' means playing in their back

garden or a trip to the local park, rather than trekking in the Andes! Who we have our adventures with is so important: outdoor adventures, whatever the inherent level of risk, are a good way of encouraging us to explore together, to discover new things about ourselves as well as others and to make new connections. However, perhaps the biggest challenge for those of us working within this industry is how to ensure that we do not inadvertently intimidate or discourage others from joining us. How do we achieve genuine social inclusion, where everyone feels able to participate at a level that is comfortable and relevant to them? I suggest ways in which more people might be enabled to experience the outdoors through environmentally and socially responsible experiences.

I argue that a one size fits all adventurous approach to outdoor education does not work, we need to allow space and time (and comfort) for a more diverse population to participate in genuine, meaningful experiences. We need to encourage people to develop confidence and take their own footsteps, not just to follow in ours: their way may be better. Perhaps contentiously, I will also be arguing AGAINST social inclusion, at least in its more usual guises, in some situations, and presenting a case for exclusion.

The story of the Tortoise and the Hare

*A HARE one day ridiculed the short feet and slow pace of the Tortoise. The latter, laughing, said: Though you be swift as the wind, I will beat you in a race. The Hare, deeming her assertion to be simply impossible, assented to the proposal; and they agreed that the Fox should choose the course, and fix the goal.*

*On the day appointed for the race, they started together. The Tortoise never for a moment stopped, but went on with a slow but steady pace straight to the end of the course. The Hare, trusting to his native swiftness, cared little about the race, and lying down by the wayside, fell fast asleep. At last waking up, and moving as fast as he could, he saw the Tortoise had reached the goal, and was comfortably dozing after her fatigue.*

*Moral: Perseverance is surer than swiftness. (Aesop's Fables, 1881)*

Aesop's Fable is one of many stories, fables and fairy tales than can be used to explore how we can facilitate outdoor learning in a way that helps to develop connections with the natural environment, building on, rather than challenging, people's individual comfort zones. It is a story familiar to many of us, often used to illustrate the importance of taking a slow and steady approach to life, and as an activity within team-building sessions. However, in reality it is a race that is unlikely to happen: Tortoise is more likely to take one look at Hare, in his waterproof, windproof, moisture-managing, fell-running kit, complete with shoes with heavily studded soles and decide not to bother! Tomorrow, he could go for a nice, gentle walk with other tortoises, amongst whom he would feel more at ease, sharing their stories, and thus more able to enjoy the experience. Although Hare was disappointed, he knew he'd have won the race, he was also secretly relieved: he'd much rather race another hare, much more of a challenge for such a



competitive animal. However, as facilitators of outdoor activities, where does that leave us? How do we offer activities that are socially inclusive, that can accommodate the needs of both the hares and tortoises in life? Should we even try to get them to participate together, at the same time? And why have I chosen to use a story to discuss social inclusion? Because this approach is something most people feel comfortable with, it is a method familiar to them:

*Since ancient times, sharing stories and unified metaphors has created commonality in our seemingly separate yet interpenetrating realities. It is the choice of shared language that contributes to shared meaning* (Forest, 2006: 2).

I have chosen to utilize an animal fable, as this genre is well suited for exploring social issues: the animals serve to *highlight contradistinctions between rich and poor, just and unjust, powerful and powerless...* (Röhrich, 2008: 150 in Katsadoros 2011: 110). Often, as in the case of the tortoise and the hare, the story contains an inversion of the normal state of affairs, a reversal of expectations; this can be a useful way of challenging established structures and hierarchies (Ibid.). Although this paper aims to be a gentle (dare I say comfortable) discursive exploration of the topic, I should make it clear that I come from a socially critical perspective,

*The socially critical approach treats environmental crises as symptoms of a larger problem in our society (Huckle 1983)—namely, the dominant role of economic considerations and the unequal distribution of resources.* (Stevenson, 2007: 142)

I have made a conscious choice to be a youth worker rather than a teacher, and to have more of a focus on the environment than on traditional, more sporting, outdoor activities. I prefer the name of environmental youth worker, which aptly describes my approach to life; paraphrasing Huckle (Ibid.): I make use of a socially critical approach to ‘young people issues’ and to environmental issues, seeing them both as a result of inequality. My argument may appear to be a personal, individual one, however I invite you to explore the political and societal issues embedded within: mine is not a lone voice, it is just the dominant one in this particular article.

There are many potential barriers to participation, some political, some social, some cultural, here I am going to focus on when *Doing* gets in the way of *Being* in nature. So who is responsible for this? Parents/carers; teachers/instructors; US!

*In significant ways, students’ experiential contact with the natural world is being curtailed and shaped...when they are “allowed” outside, their contact is structured, prescribed and limited...the kind of inductive learning that arises from relatively unstructured, outdoor activity is increasingly marginalized.* (Roberts, 2012: 99)

Sometimes we are so busy doing things, learning new skills, undertaking high risk activities that we do not allow enough time for just being there. As practitioners we may be afraid of inactivity,

of allowing our participants to be bored, fearing (often with good cause) that it will lead to misbehaviour or worse, dangerous behaviour.

*Is their challenging behaviour actually a coping mechanism, a form of communication? Are we actively listening to them? And if we are, how are we acting on what we hear? How do we respond to challenge?* (Shaughnessy and Hayes, 2012: 2).

We need to take account of our epistemological, ontological and pedagogical beliefs: these influence what and how we teach, they influence what form of knowledge we select, how we organise and subsequently deliver this to other people. I became a practitioner in outdoor settings because I like being outdoors, I am more comfortable in a wood than in a classroom, and I choose to make use of stories because I like stories: however I must not assume that others feel the same way (Zink and Burrows, 2008).

There is also the inherent challenge that one person's concept of being in nature is another's doing in nature: these are subjective terms. I am also conscious that when promoting opportunities to 'be in nature' I run the risk of being perceived as a promoter of mystical, perhaps serious, meditative and mindful, therapeutic experiences. This is something I aim to explore more in future papers, particularly in relation to identity; for the purpose of this article, I am suggesting something more akin to 'being ourselves in nature', a chance to relax and perhaps to play, in a manner reminiscent of childhood, whatever our biological age.

Every time we design, advertise, promote a new type of adventure or environmental activity we are adding to the language used to define this type of experience. The words we use, the way we express them, the images we choose to accompany the text, determine the response from the recipients of our communications. For every new person we attract, we potentially risk losing numerous more. We need to think carefully about what we are offering, and why. Are we offering more choice, a more diverse range of activities for those already likely to be participating? Perhaps something more adventurous, scarier, a chance to take things to 'the next level'? Or are we trying to attract a more diverse range of participants, who are currently not included/are excluded? These are two very different things.

In this discussion we should also explore the relationship between exclusion, participation, and under-representation, we need to define the terms in order to apply them to social inclusion:

- Participation measures observed behaviour - it is the percentage of all people doing a certain activity who belong to a specific group.
- Representation is a meta-statistic - it is the ratio of 'the participation of a specific group in a certain activity' to 'the proportion of that group in the background population as a whole'.

- Exclusion expresses how people feel (their perceptions). (OPENspace, 2008)

We can attempt to quantify participation and representation, using data from statistical surveys, however exclusion cannot automatically be inferred from underrepresentation; a group that we identify as under-represented may not feel excluded, if it has full access to opportunities to participate, but still declines. It is the concept of exclusion that particularly interests me, as it is based on perception, it is subjective and individual – it is personal.

At this point I am reminded of a close friend's response to hearing of my imminent move to Cumbria, that she was looking forward to visiting me, but wouldn't be doing any of 'those walks', she would wait in a tea room until our return. This is a woman who spends much of her life outdoors, walking her dog, gardening, growing vegetables, supporting her son at rugby. Yet she was opting out – why? Because of her perception of what walking in Cumbria would mean. I didn't overtly challenge her, instead I quietly shared my story of one of my recent experiences. I had gone out for an adventure with a small group of others, we took a boat trip across a lake then walked back along the shore. A low level, undemanding route, full of wildlife and opportunities to get to know the place, and each other: no pressure, no fuss, little cost. As I finished she smiled and said, 'I'd like to do that'. Something we could do together, and then reminisce over with a cup of tea. However, would that be enough for everyone? Would it be enough for you? For many this type of adventure would seem boring, and a waste of their time; for others, it may represent a lost opportunity to deliver the environmental message. Which is ok, they have the choice to opt out of our adventure.

So what do we actually mean by social inclusion: who needs to be included, and who does the including? And, more to the point, why were they excluded in the first place? I find this language, and the approach it attempts to explain, problematic. I agree with Edwards and Miller (2000) and Labonte (2004) that there is an embedded contradiction in the social inclusion/exclusion debate:

*How does one go about including individuals and groups in a set of structured social relationships responsible for excluding them in the first place?...To what degree might we consider wilful social exclusion by groups an important moment of conflict, an empowered act of resistance to socio-economic systems that, by their logic and rules, continue to replicate and heighten the material hierarchies of inequality? (Labonte, 2004: 117)*

Inclusion is generally viewed as a good thing, however *the notion of inclusion precisely entails the work of exclusion* (Edwards and Miller, 2000: 2). You can't have one without the other. We have a tendency to place the emphasis on inclusion rather than challenging the cause of the exclusion.

At this point, I am going to return to the Tortoise and the Hare – you may be wondering where do they fit in all of this? I have made use of them as a metaphor for two arguably, extreme, approaches to outdoor activities: the ‘fast, adventurous, race to the top’ type, and the slower, enjoying the journey, ‘not actually bothered if I don’t make it to the top’ type. In doing this, I acknowledge that experienced outdoor practitioners are aware of the need to allow for reflection, for thinking time so that participants can make sense of their experiences and identify their learning: it’s just that some of us want to do this on the journey, not wait until the end. I would also like to make use of the fable to talk about the commodification of outdoor experiences that often require expensive resources and equipment. A whole industry has arisen to meet the demand for adventure and outdoor experiences – we are evidence of that! Where the norm used to be inexpensive adventures in our gardens, school grounds and local parks, we now rely on designated centres, nature reserves and theme parks to do this for us. What were once simple, free activities accessible to all, have become expensive, complicated experiences, requiring special equipment that meets all relevant health and safety legislation. This causes exclusion: for those with less financial resources, less knowledge or confidence in outdoor settings, or come from a cultural background that does not see a value in these types of activities.

Yet, I take comfort from the fact that there is an ever-growing voice of dissent within the field, as expressed by Roberts (2012: 97): *How do we avoid the ‘McDonaldization of experience’ with its values of efficiency, predictability, calculability, and control?* Even well-meaning organisations, and experienced practitioners risk doing this: are our attempts to make the outdoors accessible to those whom the commercialisation excludes (Breeze, personal communication, May 17, 2013) actually more about including them in the commercialization? We really do need to think carefully, and critically about this, and it is an issue that has been debated for some time (for example: Loynes, 1998, 2002), with recognition that there is a dominant masculine voice in the world of outdoor learning, which gives the impression that there is only one way to do things. And the personal issue for me is that it did not represent my way of doing things; and at the political level I wanted to challenge it. These writers acknowledge the emergence of new paradigms, including the generative paradigm that is more influenced by feminine ideologies, and is supportive of creative interpretation of experience (Loynes, 2002). However, challenging existing structures and historical hierarchies takes time, and determination, especially when the established dominant voice holds such power and access to resources. There is a danger that the newer, more generative, creative paradigms will be dismissed as too ‘fluffy’ and ‘soft’, less relevant than the more traditional, harder, risky character-building ‘stuff’ of adventure/outdoor education. A rhetorical question was asked during one of the key note speeches at a recent adventure tourism conference that I attended, ‘Who wants to go on a soft adventure?’ perhaps in the expectation we would all say ‘not me’; however my answer would be ‘Bring it on, I’m more than ready’. I am sure there are others like me, it is just that our voices tend to be more difficult to hear than others.

We have become adept at considering those who have become excluded, and, in the name of social inclusion, developing methods of ‘reaching them’, to include them in what we offer. However, I think we also need to listen to those who have chosen to opt out, to exclude themselves from ‘outdoor activities’ and to consider why. It is not enough to simply provide them with resources and materials to enable them to participate in what we offer, what WE like doing. We need to explore other ways of being outdoors. We need to address the apparent hierarchical nature of activities being labelled as soft or hard, risky or safe, with the inherent implication that one is inferior to the other. To do this,

*We need to rethink, to think differently: to use our imaginations again...metaphorical language is a way of rethinking and questioning orthodox thinking. A metaphor is what it does...reorients consciousness (Greene and Griffiths, 2003: 85)*

One way we can do this is by making use of metaphors and stories to foster familiarity, comfort, to make connections and as a hook to gain attention. Stories can engage, captivate, and encourage participation. They can be personal/impersonal, use imagination, make use of our memories and reflections, and they can linger in our memory long after the experience. They are a form of education by stealth, when we don’t realise we are learning until afterwards. Narrative stories provide us with a way of understanding experience; when we listen to a story, or read someone’s story, we have a glimpse into their world, as they perceive it, and as they choose to share it with us.

*When we use our own stories, or those of others, for research, we give testimony to what we have witnessed, and that testimony creates a voice. (Etherington, 2004: 9)*

When we tell a story, especially if it is ‘our’ story, we enable others to begin to understand us. We can choose what to say, how to interpret our experiences, how much (or little) we feel comfortable to share. When we communicate our stories in written form, in text,

*They are language made solid, conversations frozen in print and picture. To understand texts is to understand the messages passing between members of society. (Rennie Short, 1991: 157)*

Stories provide a recognisable way of constructing meaning *based on culturally defined and historically situated interpretations and personal experiences* (Sarantakos, 2005: 39). We learn to recognise things, to become familiar with them and to make use of them to interpret and to understand our world. Stories told outdoors have a very special quality, especially if they incorporate things that can be interpreted in a sensory way: they can help make the link from the outer world to our inner world, and can be adapted to the specific context and culture. For the less confident storyteller there are numerous books that can help; for the more confident, the natural world provides endless resources and inspiration. However, we should remember that our own stories can be the most powerful of all.

*With narratives or stories, the salient message is retained without the “teller” being perceived as authoritarian, dictatorial or prescriptive. Because the interpretation of storytelling is open and creative, participants can bring their own experiences and modes of understanding to the reflective process. (Gray & Stuart, 2012)*

The one size fits all, off-the shelf packages approach to outdoor learning, as espoused by the need for challenge and risk, for stepping outside of your comfort zone, and undertaking a high level adventure, does not always work: for some people, it may work for some of the time, in some contexts; for others, it may create anxiety, distress and discomfort, when it would be more beneficial to enable them to enjoy space, peace of mind and comfort.

*Whenever we achieve the satisfaction of our expectations and anxiety dissolves, we feel as if we were in a comfort zone – safe, complete, free from risks and in peace with ourselves. We might even have a little taste of heaven when we feel that we have fulfilled our duty. (Zacharias 2012: 1)*

This is the position that I prefer to work from, as a learner and as a facilitator of learning in others. I dispute the ‘urban myth’ in outdoor education that encourages people to move outside their comfort zone, to stretch themselves, as a way to achieve effective learning. What do we mean by comfort zone? Is this a model or a metaphor? This is a highly contested and debated matter, much of which falls outside the scope of this article; I will be taking the term to represent a model often used within adventure and outdoor education literature as the basis for personal growth and transformation (Brown 2008). I am wary of the apparent need by some outdoor educators to create a perception of risk and challenge to induce stress as a way to achieve growth and change in participants. Like Davis-Berman and Berman (2002 in Brown 2008: 11) I argue that *the greatest amount of change comes when participants feel safe, secure and accepted*. This is of utmost importance when working with young people who are experiencing social exclusion, and whose everyday lives may be full of stress and challenge. We recognise this in our work with infants and children; why does life become so much more serious for young people? The focus shifts from playful stories, and environmental awareness, to citizenship and environmental stewardship: we have to become more responsible. Does this lie behind the apparent disconnection that young people may have with nature? Is it more a case of being disenchanted with nature, and over-burdened with its problems, than of being disconnected? Are young people opting to disconnect as a way of protecting themselves at a time in their lives when they face so many other challenges and changes?

The inherent dualistic nature of contemplative and adventurous experiences makes it a challenge for facilitators: is it possible to do both? Whilst some would argue that there is space and time at the top of mountain, after the climb has been achieved, to contemplate and reflect. There will always be others who prefer to contemplate and reflect as they go, and are perfectly happy not to

reach the top of the mountain. *Does success in including one group come at the expense of excluding another?* (Labonte, 2004: 119). I agree with Brown (2008: p.11):

*Let us provide students with favourable conditions for authentic and meaningful experiences where they are challenged in an appropriate manner and suitably supported by those with a genuine interest in their learning...*

I would go further, and argue we need to enable them to feel comfortable outdoors, to feel a sense of belonging. We need to remember the power of curiosity, awe, wonder and imagination in stimulating the senses, to allow space for curiosity, undirected attention, and natural inspiration. There is a growing awareness of the need for enchantment and for increased *attention to “reenchantment”—the phenomena of sensory, emotional, and nonrational ways of connecting with the earth’s living systems* (Barlett, 2008: 1077). I would like to see more playful activities for all ages, not just for those of pre-school and primary age.

This viewpoint is increasingly being recognised by others in the field of outdoor education (for example Nicol 2012) and the wider world of education. At this point I should also say that I find the language we use to structure and categorise our work as problematic: who gets to define adventure education? Is it outdoor education or education outdoors? Education or learning? And what do we mean by outdoors anyway? (Zink and Burrows 2008). And where does the environment fit in all this? These are all points I will be exploring within my research.

I want to redefine adventure for all, as experiences that are unusual and exciting, and may sometimes be daring, at a level appropriate and relevant to the individual. I want recognition that for some people an adventure in their back garden can be as effective a learning experience as climbing a mountain. This to me is the central tenet of social inclusion.

*As outdoor educators we need to allow sufficient space and time for people to be in nature, not just to do things in or to nature (whether that is adventurous activities or practical conservation) – in a way that is meaningful and relevant for them and enables them to reflect on their experiences and to make sense of them* (Hayes, 2012).

## **Concluding remarks**

Stories can be evocative, provocative, used to illustrate or elicit a reaction. They link the past to the present to the future; they can be reflective, a day dream or a memory. They can help to explain or to add meaning to experiences:

*All our explanations can be seen as stories. Whether we call them myths, legends, fables or hard fact, they are all stories. Our most precious scientific processes are still stories: patterns spun to explain observations, rhythms of words that change and grow as our understanding changes and patterns that might help to explain what is going on around us ...we all hunger for stories... (MacLellan, 2007, p.165)*

One of the dominant underlying assumptions in outdoor education is the need for risk, stretch and being challenged out of your comfort zone, at the expense of more contemplative, gentler experiences.

Through my research, like Nicol (2012: 8), I will be *exploring ways in which lived experiences bring together mind, body and world*; however, whilst Nicol feels the need to *challenge the view that adventurous activities are fun whilst environmental education activities are dull* (Nicol, 2001 in Nicol, 2012: 10), for me, environmental activities have always been more fun. It's just that sometimes, other people's need for speed, for adventure, for risky and dangerous adventures gets in the way of my adventures. Their DOING impedes my BEING in nature. And as a practitioner, attempting to satisfy the demands of such diverse participants, to be socially inclusive and mindful of diversity, it can be a challenge too far. When our work involves very diverse groups, for example, family groups including five year olds and 50 year olds, some with disabilities, can we create programs which are truly accessible to all? Perhaps, if we work in a way that is responsive to individuals, is needs-led and tailored to the specific needs of the specific participants (Breeze, personal communication, May 17, 2013). However, this means that all involved need to sign up to shared aims and objectives, which is not always possible in practice.

So, next time you are planning to organise a race to the top of a mountain, or a long distance kayaking expedition, count me out – I will opt for exclusion, but remember this is my choice. It is right that I should be invited, but it is equally right for my refusal to be accepted for what it is: my choice. We all have the right to choose. Now for the last time, let's return to the Tortoise and the Hare with a final question: what about the other animals that could join the race? The foxes, owls, butterflies or rabbits, where were they when the decision was taken to hold a race? Did anyone invite them to join in? My guess is that they were too busy being in nature and doing their own thing to bother about a silly race! Shame we didn't get to hear their side of the story, it may have been more interesting.

## **Acknowledgements**

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# **Being in nature: Enhancing and deepening connections with nature for people in recovery or with long term conditions**

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## **Abstract**

This paper discusses the practice of mindfulness as a means of enabling participants in outdoor and adventure experiences to engage more fully with the environment they are in, the activities they undertake and the people they meet.

In particular it illustrates the use of mindfulness with individuals and groups that may seem hard to reach, whether through age, ability or long term condition. This is of particular relevance when we face an increasingly ageing population, one which benefits from medical advances which enable activity at some level to continue well beyond retirement.

With case studies showing the engagement of a number of individuals taking part in specific activities and research findings demonstrating specific benefits we are able to see how introducing approaches to mindfulness into activity programmes leads to greater engagement, deeper connection with the natural environment and creates the potential for more sustainable programmes.

## **Introduction**

When J. Arthur Thompson, Regus Professor of Zoology at the University of Aberdeen addressed the Annual Meeting of the British Medical Association in 1914, he drew attention to the healing power of nature - *Vis Medicatrix Naturea*.

*“What then do I mean by the healing power of nature? I mean to refer to the way in which Nature ministers to our minds, all more or less diseased by the rush and racket of civilisation, and helps to steady and enrich our lives”*

He continued

*“That the healing power of nature is also that associated with mindful contact with the animate and inanimate natural portions of the outdoor environment”* (Thompson 1914)

Over a hundred years later we still live with the ‘rush and racket of civilisation’ and for some this can be an overwhelming experience. What the ‘mindful contact’ can be and how it can be used to engage with sometimes hard to reach groups, is the focus of this paper.

It illustrates how mindfulness practice can be used to enhance experience outdoors, helping deliver what the poet Wordsworth (1798) called ‘Tranquil restoration’. For those seeking to encourage participation to any degree in outdoor activities whether their adventure is a simple walk in a forest or an extended solo experience in a wild place, mindfulness practices echo the principles suggested by Goethe (Brook 2009), that we:

- Observe with patience and rigour
- Deepen a sense of wonder to the world
- Use our sensual and emotional awareness to experience phenomena as fully as possible and that we attend to connections between phenomena

Using research findings and case studies, this paper highlights how mindfulness based approaches aid greater engagement with the outdoors, encourage individuals to use outdoor, nature based activities as a cornerstone of their own programme for health, wellbeing and recovery. It presents evidence gathered from a number of projects, demonstrating an approach to activities which is more sustainable, and ultimately more beneficial for individual and environmental wellbeing.

### **What is mindfulness?**

Although emanating from a Buddhist tradition more than 2500 years old, modern mindfulness practice has been influenced by other contemplative schools including Christianity, Islam and Taoism. There are however many ways to practice mindfulness. In the context of nature connected mindfulness practices there is also a strong affinity to aboriginal, and other traditional cultures that cultivate a deep connection with the earth, nature and all aspects of our wider environment. The key though is not the meditation or other practices, of which there are many, but what mindfulness is and how it helps.

The term mindfulness is based on the Pali words ‘Sati’ and ‘Smrti’ which are usually translated as meaning awareness, attention, and remembering. These words are common to the Hindu, Vedic and Buddhist traditions and do not translate directly to the modern secular definition of Mindfulness of which an often used form is ‘paying attention, in the present moment, non-judgementally’ (Kabat-Zinn 1990).

An important point for outdoor and adventure practitioners is that for many with an established personal mindfulness practice, it can seem that using such secular translations ignores a number of issues, especially regarding what it is that the original words meaning ‘remembering’ were calling to mind. This was the traditional teachings of impermanence, and conditionality that are at the heart of the Buddhist teaching of paticca samuppada included in the Satipatthana Sutta or the Buddha’s discourse on the four foundations of mindfulness, (Sangharakshita 1954, 2003) and sometimes referred to as conditioned co-production or dependent origination (Macy 1991). This teaching refers specifically to the belief that all actions result from other actions, that our responses are subject to the conditions we ourselves bring to the situation and that everything changes, nothing is fixed. All things that are relevant to our experience of the environment, of activities and of each other, and especially to how we connect with adventure activities and the outdoor environment.

The Buddhist practice of mindfulness is also underpinned by practices of kindness, generosity, truthfulness and contentment (Gethin 2011). Brazier (2013) feels that there are dangers in divorcing mindfulness from its roots which she sees happening in an attempt to remove the ‘Buddhist’ context from modern mindfulness teaching. Personal experience seems to suggest that teachers seeking to remove such context are those without an established practice or background. In more than 10 years of teaching mindfulness in health and outdoor contexts I have never explained the core buddhist foundations to any group, yet groups have referred to the integrity and authenticity seen through the teaching and practice.

In order to understand how mindfulness practice is useful in an adventure experience context, how it enables deeper engagement and stronger connections with place, while addressing issues of personal health and wellbeing it is useful to break the modern definition down further.

‘Paying attention’ is to practise awareness and for some this is what mindfulness means, simply awareness. Unfortunately, as will be seen, if this is the only meaning, the potential value of mindfulness practice, especially to outdoor practitioners, is lost. Many meditation practices focus on developing a degree of awareness whether of the body, the breath, thoughts, feelings and emotions or examining issues such as reactivity. The tendency to catastrophise, whether noticing the rain bearing down and thinking you won’t be able to complete an activity, or noticing a recurrent pain or situation is an example of responses that can be helped by awareness practice, especially when the practice is on traditional foundations showing that whatever we experience changes and is always connected to other areas of life. A key element of awareness that can be developed by adventure practitioners is the role of intention. We can all be aware by accident, coming across a stunning sunset for example. The key to developing a deeper practice is to have the intention to be aware, an intention that can be seen when we compare the situational awareness of a first time sea kayaker and someone with an in depth knowledge of the technical skills, particular coastline, tides, fauna and flora they are able to point out to the beginner. Encouraging participants in programmes to stop and look, engage their senses, to really notice

and feel, opens them to such experience, making their connection to the event, time and place much stronger. Mindful practitioners aim for quality of experience rather than quantity. Perhaps creating clients that return, not just for the thrill, the scenery, but for the ability of the leader or guide to help them go deeper.

‘In the present moment’ is about being in the here and now, described by Tesson (2013) as ‘between longing and regret is the present’. Thoughts can mean that people are often unconsciously preoccupied with past or future events, ‘I’ve tried this route or that activity before and it was too hard’, ‘my illness means I won’t be able to sleep in a tent tonight’, ‘I used to be able to go running and now it is too painful’. People who are depressed often feel regret, sadness, or guilt about the past, and people who have anxiety or panic attacks worry about the future. Breath meditation practices even those lasting a few seconds are valuable here as we can only focus on our current breath and in doing so we focus internally rather than on the object of our anxiety, such as the abseil we are facing. Nature based practices also focus on the present moment, involving people noticing what is around them as the seasons, the light, the weather changes. Developing an appreciation that the change doesn’t make something better or worse, simply different. In this way those living with a chronic condition and practicing mindfulness may remove a resistance to concepts such as ‘pacing’ or planning, seeing that they are not about restricting behaviour rather enabling it.



**Image 1 - Meditation at High Dam, Cumbria**

The term ‘non-judgemental’ is a reflection of our modern tendency to see everything from a dualistic perspective – me and you, good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant. That day’s activity was less fun than the previous day, the view from this beach is better than the view from that beach etc. Some argue that for those facing difficulties this results in a withdrawal from interconnected life and so promote the need to seek a non-dualistic or more accepting path (Brazier, C. 2003, Sangarakshita 2003). For those with chronic illnesses, in recovery or a rehabilitation programmes, and potentially all part of an extended market for adventure, nature based activities

help in developing this path of non-judging, thus enabling people to feel less blame (the question ‘why me’?) and helping enable the degree of acceptance needed in order to progress on a route to self-management of a condition.

So whatever definition we use, it is here that mindfulness starts - developing this moment by moment, non-judgemental awareness and through engaging with the original meanings, being aware of ourselves, of others, of our environment, our responsibilities, actions and consequences. Not necessarily sitting quietly (Image 1) or being deep in thought though these may obviously be helpful. Importantly it is how we make and how we demonstrate our own connections, our own awareness; including awareness of ourselves and how we enthuse those we live and work with to do the same, how as activity leaders, instructors and guides; we ‘walk the talk’.

### **Lifestyle issues**

Look at images from trips, events, on websites and in adventure magazines and travel brochures, participants are typically white, between 18 and 60 years old, all looking fit and well. Yet while this may reflect the current market place for adventure and outdoor activities it doesn’t reflect society as a whole. For the many facing difficulties, whether financial, health or ability, it would be hard to see how the adventure and outdoor market fits into their lifestyle. While some sectors of the adventure travel and outdoor activity market place may be seeing expansion, others such as outdoor education centres are facing increasingly hard times, sometimes for the same reasons that individuals are not taking part. It is hard for funders facing restricted budgets to continue to financially support something that is not easily seen to provide inclusive, health, wellbeing and developmental activity. Unfortunately these changing economic factors continue to contribute to hard times for individuals with the lack of future employment and cost of housing being seen as responsible not only for a migration of young people to cities but for increased problems in rural areas, the very areas where much adventure takes place (Yip, P. et al 2000). At the same time these growing city centres are becoming oases of sameness and declining health, with obesity, diabetes and CHD becoming more prevalent (Bruyns 2010, WHO 2010). In fact such NCDs (non communicable diseases) are the leading cause of death in the world today and are forecast to have risen by 17% between 2004 and 2015. (WHO 2009).

This rise can be seen as demonstrating the mismatch between the way we live and the way our bodies are designed to work, the limits on our capacity to respond and adapt to our modern lifestyles. Yet WHO recommendations on lifestyle changes suggest that 80% of deaths from these causes are preventable and that lifestyle improvements could have resulted in saving 36 million deaths worldwide by 2015. Unfortunately the evidence is that the suggested minimum year on year improvement of just 2% has not happened and the mismatch continues. This is reinforced by findings that show Britain is behind European averages on years of life lost (YLL) due to some of these NCDs including heart and vascular diseases and also that there is a growing burden of disability (DALY - Disability Affected Life Years), particularly from mental disorders,

substance use, musculoskeletal disorders and falls, which are lacking an appropriate response (Murray et al 2013).

Other issues such as the addictiveness of technology means an ever increasing need not only to be 'connected', but to be seen to be so. Using the latest smart phones and tablets, allied to the need for faster broadband, 'wifi', time and labour saving devices, may help us feel more comfortable with our insulated homes and consumer lifestyle, but could mean we feel increasingly threatened by nature, our awareness of health benefits masked by the technology around us (Logan & Selhub 2012) . People spend their time on treadmills rather than woodland paths, on rowing machines rather than kayaking down a river, on an x-box game rather than real skiing. The result, that our society is stressed out, overweight, out of shape, depressed, spiritually hungry and suffering from the lifestyle diseases that are concerning the WHO (Cohen 2003). That some seek fixes in the form of antidepressants, miracle drugs, diet milkshakes, plastic surgery, or temporary relief in the form of smoking, alcohol and / or drugs is also undeniable (Barrie & Jones 2011).

While questioning the way we operate from such a disconnected, materialistic, and self-centred stance (MacKinnon 2012), Louv describes this increased alienation by coining terms such as "nature-deficit disorder" (Louv 2006). The absence of connectedness and awareness of nature resulting from fixation on artificial entertainment rather than natural wonders. Those who are obsessed with computer games or drive by car from activity to activity, miss the restorative effects that come with the nimbler bodies, broader minds and sharper senses which are developed during random running-around in everyday urban existence (Louv 2006 & 2012).

Yet these very lifestyle issues are ones that present a great opportunity for the adventure sector, whether it is in communicating through the very technology many are now using, communicating opportunities, sharing inclusive adventures through social media, or working to engage those feeling threatened by nature. Promoting activities, connection to nature, to those at risk of or with chronic diseases embeds the industry in the wellbeing sector rather than that of luxury and non-essential activity.

Mindfulness can help establish potentially life long connections with nature that will influence a person's health, their lives and that of the environment we are all part of, yet it is important to consider the messages we are giving. The growing use of 'eco-tourism' labels is criticised by many as translating to taking advantage of indigenous populations, not considering the environmental impact of travel, whether it is about 'thrill' rather than responsibility and encouraging behavioural change. For adventure practitioners it is an issue of understanding the implication of our own practice, upbringing and beliefs and how our lifestyles, our communication influences the choices we make and the messages we give to clients (Image 2). Would our lifestyle choices inspire others? Do the activities we promote or provide inspire



others, reflect their values, promote health and wellbeing? How do we know? Mindfulness helps us recognise and be congruent with our own values and those of others.



**Image 2 - We are all carrying things  
around with us, hopes, desires,  
prejudices, values.**

### **Environmental issues**

As already identified, arguments that exposure to nature impacts on health have been seen throughout the last 50 years, even as technology and urbanisation have taken a more commanding role throughout the world. Looking back we can find the growing evidence supporting nature's role in health. Evidence links environment and mental health, such as the issues of stress, depression and emotional wellbeing with immediate psychological benefits or 'Stress Recovery' (Ulrich et al 1991) and longer term benefits, 'attention restoration' (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1995). These sit alongside physiological benefits resulting from increased physical activity within nature (Pretty 2007), all supporting the well-known 'biophilia hypothesis' (Wilson 1984) that closeness to nature increases well-being.

While such evidence was growing in academia the recognition of the impact of the environment on people's lives amongst service providers was limited. Therapists themselves have been criticised for their own lack of awareness of the restorative power of nature and of the potential for ecological issues to impact on our sense of wellness (Metzner 1991). Even just a few years ago the same argument was being made that the field of psychotherapy was ignoring the healing potential of the outdoors (Beringer and Martin 2003). Now there are many arguments for improved quality of life through contact with nature (Henwood 2002) including areas as varied as a connection with other living things through initiatives such as zoo and urban farm programmes (Maller et al 2002) through to improved recognition of the value of the environment in the design of our urban areas (Frumkin et al. 2004).

The industrial and technological revolutions have served to encourage a belief that there will always be this scientific or technical fix and we have developed a mechanistic view of life that is

detached from the real world and that makes us feel superior to it - hence our mindless pollution and waste of resources. So while the distancing of man from nature cannot be disputed, it can be seen that ill health is a natural consequence of these beliefs, views and actions. All of these factors are leading to a more sedentary and reactive lifestyle. The fact that when we are forced to take a break due to ill health we take walks, or take part in activities, means we not only feel better but we are polluting less too, and such double sided benefits, to the person and the environment, are the foundation of an ecotherapeutic approach to health and provide a clear route for mindful adventure.

Significantly, while the above findings indicate that although people generally experience a sense of wellbeing when in contact with nature, the effect is much more pronounced for disabled and marginalised people, helping them to become less socially excluded. In addition to experiencing positive physical and psychological health improvements, they also reconnect with their communities, some reaching a higher level of socio-political identity. Yet at the same time Pike and Weinstock (2013) suggest that those perceived as being ill or frail are often discouraged from undertaking activities outdoors creating more barriers, greater disconnection or isolation from nature. Again adopting a mindful approach to nature, to the outdoors to adventure experiences can overcome these barriers, can result in greater engagement.

Coming back to an ‘environmental theme’ we have the statement in Roszak’s (1995) seminal work ‘Ecopsychology’ that feeling a sense of belonging to the broader natural community may be a prerequisite for increasing environmental protection. He goes on to argue that fostering ecological behaviour through expanding our sense of self, is key because ‘if the self is expanded to include the natural world, behaviour leading to destruction of this world will be experienced as self-destruction’ (Roszak, Gomes, & Kanner 1995, pp.1-17). So activities that enable people to feel a sense of belonging, to engage their senses and become more aware, more mindful may help in strengthening communities, and protecting the very environment we all enjoy. Again creating a sense of ownership not only of our own wellbeing but of the environment we are part of (image 3).



**Image 3 - Forestry Campaign notice**

## Case Study 1 - Barbara



**Image 4 - Barbara taking a ferry to a Lake District walking venue**

Not your typical candidate (Image 4) for an outdoor programme, Barbara's (name changed for publication) background ranges from having Bronchial Pneumonia and TB as a child through to the discovery of tumours on vertebrae as an adult, she raised a family and worked as a senior sister in A&E. Continuing back pain curtailed a nursing career. An MI (Myocardial Infarction or Heart Attack) in the late 90s was followed by kidney cancer in 2004. Further heart problems resulted in 3 x angioplasty in 6 years. Further problems included Rheumatoid Arthritis, Gall Bladder removal, another MI, Pancreatitis and Shingles.

Her mindfulness programme included traditional methods encouraging movement, meditation and other activities to develop awareness, the capacity to engage fully with less reactivity, catastrophising and self-doubt. The programme soon introduced nature and outdoor based elements to provide a wider perspective and means of making connections that can be used in the self-management of her conditions, including flare-ups. From the Barbara's own reflections, **does mindfulness in and of nature make a difference?**

*Definitely, yesterday it was noticing magpie chicks in a nearby tree, today I saw lambs and baby calves, tomorrow I'm going for a walk and will look at flowers that have grown in the park. The seasons of the year show me new life in spring, peace in autumn and anticipation in winter. Nature helps me cope with all my illnesses, worries and stresses, mindfulness gives me space to think, to be me not anyone else's version of what I should be.*

*The regular trips I now take to the Lake District, with a guide to ensure my wellbeing, provide me with experiences and memories that help me when I'm facing difficulties at home.*

## Case Study 2 - Karen

Karen had been badly affected by break up of her family, physical abuse, and the death of her best friend from cancer. Her GP prescribed the antidepressant drug Cipralex (escitalopram oxalate), a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI), the provision of computer based cognitive behaviour therapy (CCBT) was also deemed an appropriate intervention. However during treatment there followed increased disruption in daily life, including further alienation from family, leaving her university course and withdrawal from relationships with friends. Although an active young woman involved in rugby and windsurfing coaching she had gradually withdrawn from regular exercise.



She attended a community based course - 'Dealing with Challenging Times' which led to interest in Mindfulness and Outdoor Therapy. Having identified core activities, including rock climbing and running, specific mindfulness practices such as meditation, mindful movement and breath awareness were introduced. These practices became part of a daily routine providing a regular 'safe place' where she was confident she could spend time with herself and be safe with her own issues and emotions. Reflection on all activities was and continues to be at the core of the programme. This reflection and resulting guidance contributed to the expansion of activity to include adventure racing and eventually leading to study and qualification as a personal trainer.

Neither GP nor CCBT intervention had engaged at this depth, yet self-management is an important aspect of managing depression (Kennedy et al 2004), an issue illustrated as a result of a widely reported, yet flawed, recently published study suggesting that exercise does not help those with depression (Chalder 2012). Informed responses highlighted the many flaws in the study, most significantly that participants did not engage with the programme, did not engage effectively in self-management or exercise. Mindfulness based adventure activities clearly promote 'ownership' of the activity by the client. In this case giving her the tools needed to use adventure and outdoor activities to provide the means by which she manages her condition. As a result she has returned to university, is in a relationship and regularly runs and enjoys snowboarding.

### Case study 3 - Young men's group

A Mindfulness Based Adventure Therapy (MBAT) programme, was and is being used with a variety of individual and group interventions for young men. The participants ranged in age from 14 to 21 years old and from a variety of educational and family backgrounds. Some faced difficulties at home or school, others were dealing with the transition from one life stage to another.

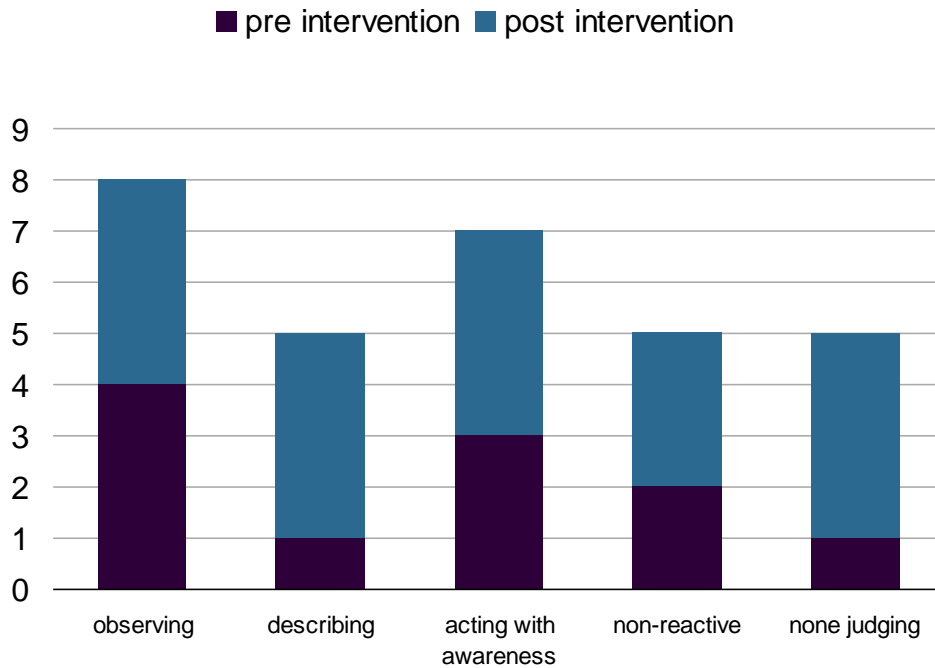


It is recognised that behavioural issues including violence amongst young people can be directly linked to the struggle for recognition amongst peer groups, a lack of status and low or inappropriate self-esteem. For this reason the initial MBAT programmes are aimed and developed specifically for individuals. By working with individuals we remove the barriers caused by 'Group Dynamics' allowing development to occur, confidence and self-esteem to be gained and consolidated before moving on to working in groups or reintegration within their chosen environment.

Such a programme echoes traditional and contemporary 'rites of passage' projects though with the key differences that the use of mindfulness encourages greater self-awareness and reflection (TOPSIG 2012) and at the same time, like all Adventure Therapy (AT), encompasses a wide spectrum of approaches and activities to promote well-being and change. In particular the core outdoor elements, especially solo experiences, foster stronger connections to our environment and encourage participants to see and understand the nature of actions and consequences on self and others including nature in its widest context.

An improved connection to nature may only help if it is as readily accessible as a packet of cigarettes, if the "high" outdoor activity produces is equivalent or better than the artificial "high" induced by drugs or alcohol. Similarly the sense of achievement through a long solo journey, the boost in self-esteem, may be recognised within their peer group who have had similar experiences, yet if the connection is only this then it is unlikely to have an impact on the individual's daily lifestyle. Surely a role for ongoing adventure and development through community and centre based activity.

## Mindfulness in Nature - examples from a pilot study



**Chart 1: Five facets of Mindfulness**

Participants took part in a Nature Based Mindfulness programme that included the core practices of the traditional 8 week programme including:

- Breath awareness
- Mindful Movement including tai chi and chi gung, and Mindful Walking,
- Meditation practices including Body Scan, Mindfulness of Breathing, Kindly Awareness

On to which some or all of the following was introduced according to participant preference, ability and aptitude

- Sense and Nature awareness practices
- Solo experiences including Journeying
- Journalling including social media, video, photography, poetry and art

Evaluation included the 5 facets of mindfulness questionnaire (Baer 2008) chosen because of its effectiveness across a wider variety of experiences and especially considering pre and post programme issues of ‘apparent mindfulness’ and what the author refers to as ‘experiential mindfulness’ i.e. A response once you’ve got more experience of what mindfulness is and how it manifests itself in your daily life. It was also chosen as it almost directly follows Goethe’s instructions detailed earlier.

As chart 1 shows, improvements are seen in an individual’s ability to be observant of life around them, describe their experiences, to act with more awareness of their own impact on self and others and to be less judgemental of themselves. These points can be critical for those with chronic conditions, physical and psychological, helping to remove a ‘why me?’ or ‘it’s my fault’ reaction. In fact a key aspect of the whole mindfulness programme is it encourages this, allows time for a less reactive, more responsive process. We can see improvement across a range of activities:

- Observing (though here we have the previously mentioned experiential issues of thinking you are mindful or observant because you’re not sure what it actually means to be so)
- Describing - being able to express thoughts, feelings and emotions more effectively
- Acting with awareness - understanding the impact of personal actions on self, others and the environment
- Being able to be less reactive, having the ability to choose how to respond rather than just jumping in
- Being less judgemental, less blaming of themselves and others

### **Connectedness to nature scale**

The connectedness to nature scale (CNS) (Mayer & Frantz 2004) is designed to illustrate an individual’s experiential connection to nature and how it influences behaviour. Its development follows the sagacious contention more than 60 years ago that people need to feel they are part of the broader natural world if they are to effectively address environmental issues (Leopold 1948). Using the scale the intention was to examine how individuals identified their sense of place within the natural world and whether this identification then encourages a greater engagement such as concern for environmental protection

The CNS was chosen as it is simple to administer, predicts behaviour, has been found reliable in use with a variety of groups and individuals and can be used to generate discussion relating to thought process, and the mindfulness of actions and consequences. It also demonstrates links between personal well-being and feeling connected to nature. The results obtained showed very

similar connections to nature between a group working in the outdoors (outdoor instructors, foresters, rangers) and those taking part in the nature based mindfulness group.

However what the results don't show for either group is the impact of a connection with nature on daily life. In fact when the Sense Awareness Inventory was administered the mindfulness group achieved different results regarding awareness of what makes them feel good, be happy etc. which could suggest that while the outdoor workers had a strong connection to nature it failed to have a daily beneficial effect. This is an area that will be examined in future research.

Sight	Sound	Taste	Touch	Smell
Sunshine	Waves crashing	Ice cream	Polished wood	Airports
Xmas trees	Laughing	Fruit cake	Pile of leaves	Seaside
waves	Drums	Bacon sandwich	Hugs	Wild garlic
smiles	Rushing river	Fresh stream water	Rock	Frying
Open fire	seagulls	cheese	Fur	Fresh grass
Falling leaves	Birds singing	dumplings	Icy cold	Salt & vinegar
hawks	Wind	oranges	Wind	Wood burning
Dog wagging tail	Crackling fire	Fresh air on cold morning	Warm fleece	Pine forest
Snowing		coriander	Hot bath	
Breath freezing		seaside	Girl friend	

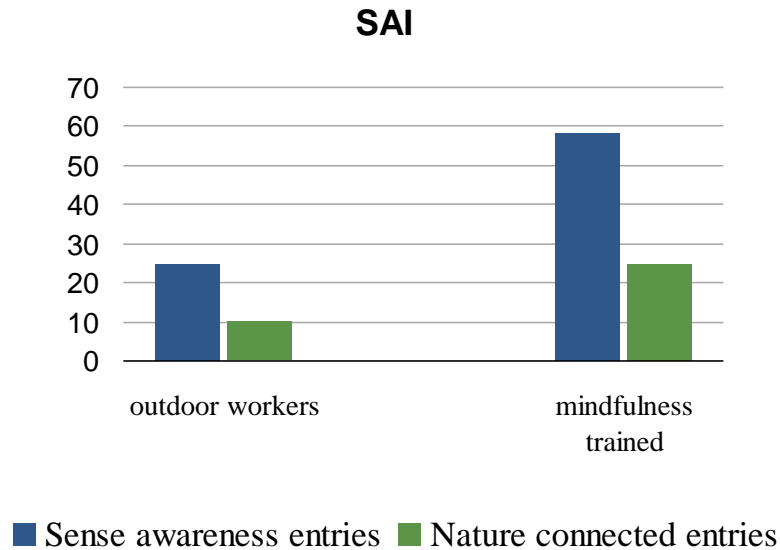
**Chart 2. Sample sense awareness inventory with yellow highlighting natural items**

The sense awareness inventory (Burns 1998) enables an individual to reflect on their experience (chart 2). It allows them to highlight aspects of awareness, a particular sense, that could be worked with in more detail and it allows questions such as

*'If these are things that make you feel good how often do you do experience them' and 'what stops you'?*



These questions are especially relevant when our results show that most are free (hence the slight modification - removing the ‘activity’ column of Burns’ original as it was found items in the activity column often involved cost, which may limit the engagement of certain client groups).



**Chart 3. Comparison of sense awareness inventory entries illustrating differences between group of outdoor workers and those participating in mindfulness in nature group** (While both cohorts had very similar responses to the CNS, those who had received mindfulness training recorded more for all sense responses than those in the comparison group of outdoor workers).

## Conclusion

Mindfulness helps people become less reactive and judgemental, more self-reliant, more aware and have a greater sense of the world around them. Through developing and emphasising natural connections and strengthening awareness, nature based mindfulness encourages opening and embracing our connections to all around us. It provides tools for self-management and can be used across cultural, financial and other boundaries.

*Go climb the mountains and get their glad tidings. Nature’s peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy. While cares will drop off like autumn leaves. (Muir 1901)*

For all those involved in outdoor and adventure experiences, whether formal delivery in centres and guided holidays or informal through creating opportunities for others to experience our environment for themselves, mindfulness practice can make a difference. It helps staff recognise and manage their own thoughts, feelings, stress and enjoyment and aids those taking part to get more from every experience whether a dramatic river rafting journey or a walk in a wood.

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# Teaching outdoor sports for understanding. An *ecological* approach.

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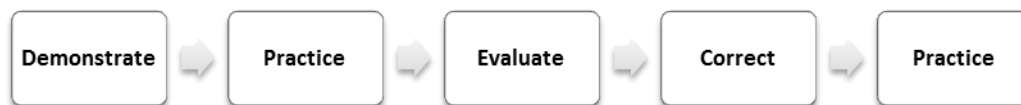
## Abstract

Safety and technical skills are usually taught through traditional ‘drill’ methods. This approach is justified in terms of risk management and driven by social risk aversion. Despite this, experiential learning theory and alternative methods of teaching sports have allowed us to find other kind of activities which can be based in the *Sporting Ecosystem*. This paper explains this new concept, through critical argument and practical experiences. It is argued that this approach allows apprenticeships to be more authentic, understanding outdoor sports through holistic activities.

**Keywords:** outdoor learning, teaching outdoor sports, teaching games for understanding, ecological approach, outdoor education, experiential learning.

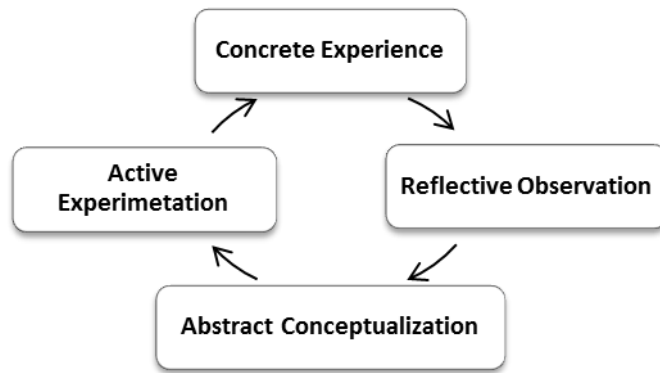
## Two different theories

The method traditionally used to teach technical and safety skills in outdoor and adventure sports is based on analytical and isolated ‘drills’; the wide-ranging, holistic work of Wagstaff & Attarian (2008) is a good example. Fear of risk and concern about physical execution of actions usually delay participation in the actual activity. Similarly, Gilbertson et al (2006) propose this “sequence of effective instruction” to developing physical skills in outdoor education, based on a “skill and drill” method where the teacher is the key element of the apprenticeship.



**Fig. 1. Based on “sequence of effective instruction” (Gilbertson et al, 2006: 109)**

Since Kolb (1984) proposed his experiential learning model, we have a better reference to conceiving learning as ‘a holistic process’ however, “not [just] in terms of outcomes” (Ibid: 26), but where “it has involved transactions between the person and the environment” (Ibid: 34).



**Fig. 2. Kolb's Cycle of Experiential Learning**

This approach illustrates a different point of view, allowing the development of more real and holistic tasks. Even so, the practitioners and customers (the teachers and learners) usually think a drill or progressive approach equates to professionalism and expertise, because the assessment is easier, the risk is controlled (perhaps) and our vocational training and their previous experience, respectively, suggest that this is the best way to learn. We are designed to reproduce that which works, even more if it is more about safety than learning.

People can have a special outdoor experience in both cases, but sometimes they spend too much time learning technical skills and less time enjoying the actual activity; everybody wants to “do” (play) the activity. In most situations it will be a one-day experience; they will probably not repeat the experience for a long time. We must reflect on how we can make our programmes more authentic and natural from the beginning.

### **Three misunderstanding stereotypes**

We can observe three clichés about outdoor-sport teaching (Perez-Brunicardi, 2012):

- Beginning with isolated tasks to learn technical skills and after that teaching the ‘global’ (holistic) game.
- Teaching safety rules and technical skills in predictable situations through a direct control methodology allows the avoidance of risks.
- Good teachers or practitioners perform complicated and elaborated activities that allow them to show their professional skill.



**Photo 1. *Climbing duel*: Learning safety skills through isolated games face to face in a rock climbing training course.**

These kinds of activities break the link of teachers to nature and learners to authentic outdoor sports. Commensurate with Greenaway (2005), Harvey (2011: 5) states that we conceive of outdoor learning as “an active, experiential approach to learning”, and the outdoor activities “as a vehicle for transforming the experience into knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours”. Isolated tasks to learn technical skills, rejection of the risk during apprenticeship and complexity of modern outdoor activities push nature into the background. It is rather paradoxical when nature is the aim and the reason of the outdoor sports; isolated tasks only delay the real experience.

As Elkind (2007) submits, there are three misunderstandings about how children learn: a) the *Watch Me* theory, b) the *Little Sponge* theory and c) the *Look Harder* theory. We can usually observe all of these elements in outdoor-sport teaching, where learners are able to undertake significant learning in real contexts, through self-experience. As Priest (1990) suggests, the experiential learning approach suggested by Kolb (1984) is essential for authentic apprenticeship outdoors, as outdoor education, staged primarily in the natural environment, is an experiential way of learning which makes use of all senses (Priest, 1990).

As practitioners, we are working to research different kinds of methods for teaching outdoor sport, finding inspiration in *Teaching Games for Understanding* (Bunker & Thorpe, 1982; Kirk & MacPhail, 2002), the *Game Sense* approach (Den Duyn, 1997) and the *Play Practice* method (Lauder, 2001). These game-centred methods for teaching team sports focus on tactics and global situations, with technical skills learned in modified games.

The essence of outdoor education is what we call the *Sporting Ecosystem* (Perez-Brunicardi, 2012). It involves: direct contact with ourselves individually and with nature and the environment (Martin, 1999); reciprocal relationships; caution and boldness; safety and risk management; responsibility for and admiration of nature; instabilities and uncertainty in the working environment; and search for a challenge. It is a holistic experience, and impossible to fragment it.

This learning method seeks to develop holistic sports activities honestly and naturally, integrating all the elements of the *Sporting Ecosystem* to achieve a more authentic experience from the

beginning. While in competitive team sports the focus is on tactics (e.g. basketball, soccer, handball), in outdoor and adventure sports the focus is on each *Sporting Ecosystem*.

The meaning of outdoor sports, through outdoor education for example (Priest, 1986), is explained in terms of:

- The relationship with nature in uncertain and risky conditions.
- The relationship between participants in collaborative situations.

These relationships must show, in Colin Mortlock's (1984: 18) words:

- AN AWARENESS OF, RESPECT FOR, AND LOVE OF SELF balanced against
- AN AWARENESS OF, RESPECT FOR, AND LOVE OF OTHERS balanced against
- AN AWARENESS OF, RESPECT FOR, AND LOVE OF THE ENVIROMENT.

An ecosystem is a system of interactions within a community in a particular area and environment. Teachers and practitioners can discover in this *Sporting Ecosystem* how learners understand:

- The beauty of the natural field, not only a playing field.
- The importance of sustainability, as a golden rule.
- The necessity of risk management, not risk-aversion.
- The usefulness of technical and safety skills in their context, not learning meaningless, uncontextualised skills.
- The need for good health, both their own and of the environment.
- The chance to tackle a challenge, not necessarily in competition.
- The opportunity for sharing the responsibility.
- The value of collaboration, indispensable in adventure sports.





**Fig. 3. The *Sporting Ecosystem* in outdoor sport.**

To achieve this goal, and to learn outdoor sports, we modify activities, managing the risk and keeping an overall ‘logic’. Thereby, we aim for participants to be in the right context for actually practicing most of the time.

Learners need to resolve problems to understand the *Sporting Ecosystem*, sharing responsibilities and becoming aware of sustainability issues. They must feel part of the ecosystem and be attracted by nature. Those answers, and those feelings, only can be found through authentic activities. Apprenticeship in outdoor sport must be developed through tasks which include most of these ecosystem categories. Drills cannot offer enough opportunities or situations to understand the breadth of the *Sporting Ecosystem*.

Critics of such methods would think that safety cannot be learned through holistic tasks. “Risk-aversion” (Gill, 2007) is not a substitute for risk management. Is zero-risk possible in real life? It is even more appropriate and pertinent to outdoor learning: learners must understand and feel the risk, not just avoid it. Risk is not the same as danger, and safety must be understood by undertaking risk-based tasks, within actual activities.

Our experience has shown us that it “is” possible. We are working to develop global tasks which teach safety and technical skills into the *Sporting Ecosystem* context. In this way, learners experience real sports from the beginning.

## Four practical examples

From the last 20 years we looked for learning activities which allow the teaching of outdoor sports to have their own *Sporting Ecosystem*; four of these activities are examined below.

Learning to lead sport-climbing routes, putting the quickdraws in the anchors and the rope in the quickdraws, the learners just climb in top-rope style and use another rope to learn calmly and safely (*mock lead climbing*, in Spanish: *false leader*). After this, the learner can understand the sense of safety techniques, in a real-world context. If they are not made to spend time on isolated tasks or progressive drills, they can learn while they are climbing. The climbing slowly gets harder, the outcomes deeper and more enjoyable.



**Photos 2a – 2b. Mock lead climbing: learning safety skills during rock climbing activity.**

When the risk is on the *pitch*, as in water-based sports we select the best situation to learn, balancing risk and challenge, and giving appropriate levels of assistance (e.g., using large, unsinkable and stable flat-water canoes to learn on lakes). In this situation, we don't spend time explaining technical skills on the shore. We prefer to explain only basic items (such as safety) and teach the rest while they are canoeing, through games for understanding, symbolic play or theatrics. One of the best activities is *Canorienteeering*. The learners focus their attention on the challenge of orienteeering with a lake map. They learn how to manoeuvre the canoe and paddle intuitively with a few explanations during the activity. In their minds, they can be Canadian indigenous people looking for their own "sustenance" or pirates looking for treasure.

The learners usually seem impatient at the beginning: they want to play, to navigate. The teacher does not insist on repeating previous explanations, not even technical knowledge. The teacher thinks about safety, but does not spend time on instructions about a task which can be learned during the activity.



**Photo 3. *Canorienteing*: learning technical skills (paddling) going after global canoeing challenge (orienteing) playing like Indians.**

Another particular situation where analytical and isolated methods are often used is in technical sports such as skiing or surfing. In a one-day programme the trainees should not waste time on isolated tasks. Modern equipment can allow actual skiing or surfing from the beginning; we just choose the proper slope or appropriate waves. In the first case, cross-country skiing is preferred, because it allows the learner to slide naturally and in closer contact with nature, away from crowds. In the same way, to learn surfing stand-up paddling is preferred; learners feel the balance and play with small waves from the beginning.



**Photo 4. *Follow me!* learning technical skills during a cross-country skiing route.**

The fourth example is a method of trail-running training with young people. The principle aim of trail running is to run for a long period of time in nature. The trainees must understand the importance of running at their own pace, with a good rhythm, and to feel the attraction of running through nature. In this way, competition is not the priority but the challenge of keeping the rhythm and pace. Events are organized that present a challenge to runners according to their ability and interest. Three or four itineraries are created; the runners select one of them and try to finish it. All the runners who can finish achieve the goal. With young children an adult runs with them, setting the pace, although children usually run with their parents. The itineraries must be

enjoyable and entertaining, on different kinds of path, and they can run again at the next level itinerary, which forms positive reinforcement for them. Young runners feel good about themselves when they run within themselves and are able to run further than they have. There is no ranking or qualification, only the pleasure in running in nature and mastering the challenge; if they run, this prize is the same for all of them. Its fun nature means that we also use this method for off-road duathlon teaching.



**Photo 5. Training Trail Running: learning to run on their own pace**

## **Conclusion**

The ecological approach presents an overall *ecological ecosystem* as a learning object, where sustainability, security or technical skills don't have to be learned in isolation. Adventure tourism or outdoor adventure education are the contexts in which the authenticity of activity may be key for the best experiences. Tourists and trainees are learners who want to feel like authentic adventurers; why start by providing out-of-context activities? We don't want to waste time just teaching technical skills. As outdoor educators we must make an effort to provide the best experience from the first minute.

## **One wish**

We hope this paper help to stimulate discussion about outdoor sport teaching and be the beginning of some kind of international collaboration, sharing experiences and research about outdoor learning in educational, tourism and leisure contexts. As practitioners, we love outdoor sports and nature. We want learners to discover it as we do: naturally, truly, authentically.

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Perez–Brunicardi, D.

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# **Eliciting nature and landscape writing through outdoor experiences**

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## **Abstract**

Nature and landscape writing includes creative writing about wild places. However, most authors have a literary background and are not outdoor ‘educators’. Using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, the reasons suggested are a lack of framing of outdoor experiences for this intent, the need for learning the skills of interpretation and lexicon and the offer of prolonged, powerful experiences and time for creative thinking and responses, such as an extended solo. It is suggested that outdoor educators may be too busy ‘experiencing’ to write, that they do not go ‘slow’ enough or that they are encapsulated in the ‘edginess of existence’ through adventure and just pass through their surroundings rather than connect with them. Outdoor educators have much to offer as they experience metaphorical or literal journeys comprising ‘flow’ rather than episodic encounter through lived experience to create rich embodied stories with ideological and social aspects so often overlooked in narrative.

**Keywords:** nature writing, landscape writing, outdoor education, slow, lexicon

## **Introduction**

Nature writing is a phenomenon rooted in tradition which includes creative writing about wild places and nature in prose or poetry and the relationship between ecology and literature (writers such as Aldo Leopold and Gilbert White). Some consider that there has been a transformation into landscape writing this century developing as a ‘*democratic art*’ (Crown, 2012) with the works of authors such as Kathleen Jamie, Roger Deakin and Robert McFarlane. Ramaswamy (2012) suggests that the field has broadened in recent years to include travelogue, reportage, memoir, psychogeography, simple profundity, watchfulness and imagination.

There is no doubt that the majority of outdoor educators find many wild places exhilarating, inspiring and magical. There is much writing about lived experiences and personal narratives of journeys and adventures through landscapes and nature, “... human experience in all its personal, social and environmental complexity is unpredictable, and, in many cases, unspeakable.” (Higgins & Wattoo, 2013:30). Outdoor educators have contributed to research on developing place consciousness and understanding place identity. However, it is not clear why we do not

seem to elicit more powerful, creative writing through outdoor education or by outdoor educators? We need to instil observation, capitalise on curiosity, value ‘slow’ outdoor experiences and encourage reported reflection.

## **Methodology**

The research undertakes a hermeneutic phenomenological approach which seeks to co-construct meaning through the interpretation of texts. It examines how people interpret and record meaning in their experiences in outdoor environments through lived experiences. It is an interpretivist approach in which interpretation and meaning making are embedded features of experiences (Findlay et al. 2012) away from conscious knowing. Hermeneutic phenomenology privileges artistic forms of expression through cognitive and non-cognitive constructionism. It differs from content analysis which examines how language constructs phenomena, not how it reflects or reveals it. The range of underlying reasons for the dichotomy of outcomes through co-construction are rationalised and questioned.

## **Outdoor ‘educators’ and writing**

Journeying is a key experience through which outdoor ‘educators’ have tried to parallel creative writing and lived experience leading to poetic and/or descriptive writing (Higgins & Wattachow, 2013; Haluza-Delay, 2001). Reflections on outdoor experiences have led to successful narrative and poetic representations. However, for many, it would seem that outdoor educators are as much out of their comfort zones as literary writers are in their undertaking of a multi-day journey or being in an outdoor environment for prolonged periods of time. “After walking the Pennine Way a couple of summers ago, I swore I’d never do it again ... it was a 21-day slog across saturated uplands, most of it in a blur of lead-coloured mist.” (Armitage, 2013). There is a definite differentiation between literal and metaphorical journeys.

Such writing is often retrospective: a journey is undertaken and subsequently used as an experience to reflect on but not set up with that intention. However, from early childhood, outdoor experiences provide contexts for speaking and listening and, often in primary schools, for writing. Sound educational pedagogy comprises primary and secondary (reflective) components (Dewey, 1981). It is hard to achieve some learning outcomes in literacy without a context and experiences can be enhanced through the use of personal narrative. “The outdoor experience gives students something immediate and deeply felt to write about.” (Bennison & Olsen, 2002:241). Latosi-Sawin (2004) echoes this sentiment by his research on the inspiration felt by a group of higher education students during an outdoor semester towards creative writing about wild places and nature.

Perhaps it is the more prolonged or intense experiences which can elicit powerful responses by outdoor educators because anything less in a temporal or diffuse sense is the ‘norm’? Campbell (2010) for example, describes the responses produced by a group of students during a five day



solo in unfamiliar terrain in the Cantabrian Mountains of northern Spain. It was not only their verbal and person-centred responses to such a challenge and her management concerns as a tutor which are interesting but, for the purposes of this paper, the outputs in terms of the level of creativity and critical thinking or personification of the environment which were more powerful, polished and thoughtful than anything produced in the classroom or valley campsite. This and the development of place consciousness (Asfeldt et al., 2009) argues against spontaneity (Higgins & Wattchow, 2013).

Psychogeography may support spontaneous creativity since it defines an approach based on playfulness and drifting, focussing on the behaviour and emotions of individuals. Coined originally in an urban environment, the *dérive* (or drift) is defined by Situationists as the technique of locomotion without a goal (Plant, 1992). It is exciting for some as a rather inductionist approach whereby an individual is drawn to the attractions of terrain and encounters found therein. Certainly, this term has now been extended beyond the urban to make meaning and reflection of range of environments (e.g. Self, 2007). It has not been directly attributed to explorations by outdoor educators although this is not to prohibit such ‘saunterings’ or ‘wanderings’.

Martin (2005) suggests that describing experiences of human inter-relationships is far easier than seeking a lexicon to mantra human-nature relationships, since the latter are less contemplated and less familiar. Lived experiences rely on intuitive feelings rather than melodrama or close encounters and thus, perhaps need a period of learning to interpret such subconscious reactions. A scarcity in appropriate language in human-nature relationships is also acknowledged although cognition and linguistic development are parallel phenomena without a strong causal relationship (Goodluck, 1991).

Successful writers such as Jamie (2005) offer ‘queer’ and disparate subjects (Crown, 2012). Through an outdoor lens, they vary from Orkney in midwinter, to a pair of nesting peregrines to 21<sup>st</sup> century flotsam on a Hebridean strandline, usurped by a visit to the basement of a hospital and its pathology laboratory (Jamie, 2012a). She has established an essay form and content which is precise and crafted but with room for play and imagination not without concern about its place in literature, “We had a horror of it turning up in the ‘body, mind and spirit’ section of the bookshops” (Jamie, 2012b).

## **Findings**

The masters of literary writing appear to enjoy being in the natural environment. Perhaps they choose their environments to write creatively about them; to revitalise the familiar and engender fresh curiosity? Some of these environments would not be selected by outdoor educators and the resulting works are often lacking in the flow that would be exhibited by a journey. It is suggested that outdoor educators are usually in natural environments to experience them rather than to report on them or if there are stories to tell, these are descriptions of ‘doing’. They might take

photographs for others or for a travelogue. A by-product is reflection, often processing the experience to make meaning of it or through an intrinsic aesthetic response such as art, sculpture, poetry or prose often in the form of an image of personal feelings rather than any detailed observation of the landscape. Critics of nature writing see it as celebrating nature as a restorative and regenerative force, positioning it often uncritically as a central object of study ('ecocentrism'). It might omit the social or ideological aspects of narrative by placing nature writing in an aesthetic or psychologising framework (Armbruster & Wallace, 2001). Outdoor educators are well placed to combine the social with aesthetic dimensions.

Thus, it might be necessary to frame an outdoor experience with the intention of eliciting landscape and nature writing (or some other creative response) rather than subsequently through reflection; to present powerful but not melodramatic experiences of nature and landscape; to allow for learning in terms of the skills of the interpretation of such experiences in words; and, to offer prolonged experiences and time in which to allow creative thinking and responses, through iteration if required. It is possible that we need not venture far from home to connect with nature and landscape (Dewey, 1981).

Are outdoor educators connecting with nature or just passing through? Although there may be a subconscious effort to internalise thinking and appreciation, outdoor educators are too busy 'experiencing' to write about their environments or encapsulated in the 'edginess of existence' through adventure to concentrate on self-actualisation. It could be that they just do not have the words to capture the image of the landscape or that they just do not go 'slow' enough. Outdoor adventurers and explorers do have something to offer because they usually have an objective and undertake a journey which encapsulates a continuous experience. Multiple observations of place can provide rich and powerful writing (e.g. Sprackland, 2013) and a psychogeographical approach has currency, but movement through a landscape gives the potential for change and spatial difference. There is some evidence to suggest that a prolonged or solo experience enhances the level of creativity about an environment but there is a need to find words which appropriate towards a response and which are not always easily forthcoming.

## **Conclusion**

It is suggested here that outdoor educators have much to offer and that they should read and explore the vocabulary and lexicon of landscape and nature writing. Through adventure or being in nature, they experience a metaphorical or literal journey, or both, whereby there is 'flow' rather than episodic encounter. There is often an objective or target making for a rich embodied story, with ideological and social aspects so often overlooked in narrative (Kollin, 2000).

Outdoor educators often encourage reflective and creative writing as part of the facilitation of outdoor experiences for others, particularly young people. It is important to extend this to themselves as professionals and to create a rich and inclusive interface and legacy through writing.

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### **Codicil**

Describe gannets fishing and/or watch,

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/life/Northern\\_Gannet#p007yyly](http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/life/Northern_Gannet#p007yyly)

Write about what you have seen.

Compare this to Jamie (2012b), p. 85

*“Gannets glitter. They’re made for vision, shine in any available light, available to see and be seen. Their eyes are round and fierce, with a rim of weird blue, and they are adapted to see down through the surface reflections of the sea. There, they take what they need and what they don’t. Less patrician poet, more bargain-hunter”*

# **Indicators for sustainable adventure tourism in South Africa: LARASA conference delegates' perspective**

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## **Abstract**

South Africa's diverse terrain and its climate, suited to outdoor activities, make it an ideal hunting ground for adrenaline seekers. The adventure industry in South Africa has seen many unsustainable practices being implemented during the developmental and operational stages of tourism planning. This threatens the adventure industry and the country's envisaged legacy of sustainability and responsible tourism. This paper provides sustainable adventure tourism indicators that are divided into economic (7), social (7) and environmental spheres (13) which can be used to develop, manage and maintain sustainable adventure tourism destinations. A pilot study was conducted, and delegates at the Leisure and Recreation Association of South Africa (LARASA) Congress in 2012 were approached to rate these indicators in terms of importance. *Quantitative data was analysed using frequency analysis on SPSS and Fleiss Kappa method.* Indicators were formulated based on *The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC, n=16)* *The International Eco Tourism Society (TIES, n=4)*, and *The Millennium Development Goals (MDG's, n=7)*.

## **Keywords**

Adventure tourism, Sustainable indicators, Sustainable tourism

## **Introduction**

Adventure tourism, according to the Southern African Tourism Update (2013), is booming across the continent as per the industry experts. Heyniger and Xola Consulting (2013) also acknowledged based on the Colorado Business Magazine that Africa including Botswana, Uganda, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe are proving quite popular adventure destinations among those with passion for adventure. Southern Africa, or the African continent in general, has also received a major boost as a top adventure destination with the current announcement that Adventure Travel Trade Association's next conference will be held in Namibia (26-31 October 2013) for the first time since its inception.

Being at the southern tip of a large continent, South Africa offers 3 000 kilometres of coastline along with breath-taking mountains, often side by side. The country's diverse terrain, together with a climate suited to outdoor activities: make it an ideal hunting ground for adrenaline seekers. South Africa offers world-class climbing, surfing, diving, hiking, horseback safaris, mountain biking, river rafting and just about any other extreme activity one can name, all supported by dedicated operators (South Africa, 2012). US adventure travel website iExplore, which caters for high-end travellers searching for adventure and unique experiences, placed South Africa second in its list of top worldwide travel destinations for 2007, a steady climb up from third in 2006, sixth in 2005, and 13th in 2004.

These adventure activities are based in natural, often rugged, outdoor locations, and let participants interact with their environment in the form of hiking, rafting, kayaking, mountain biking and many more according to Cashmore (2002). The Adventure Tourism Society (ATS, 1999), a US industry organization, points out that the people throughout the world will continue to leave the beaten path in record numbers for this type of tourism. But Page (2003), suggests that, among all the good adventure tourism can offer, future developments and adventure destinations must be careful of the environmental costs of increasing numbers of travellers seeking remote locations to experience and undertake their activities.

According to Weber (2001) there is little information published regarding adventure tourism phenomena worldwide, which should be of interest to researchers and practitioners to engage in more research to further and explore the industry. Research into the sustainability of adventure tourism in South Africa is limited and more research in this regard should be conducted in order to provide adventure tourism destination managers insight on decision-making during development and managing adventure destinations. Adventure tourism is still to play an increasingly important role in national and local development (Zurick, 2005). Therefore the appraisal of adventure for sustainable development prompts critical study of the interactive roles of economic growth, social and environmental sustainability.

The aim of this study is to develop indicators for sustainable adventure tourism destinations. This study focuses on South Africa, as its adventure products offerings mean that it is regarded as one of the best adventure destinations in the African continent. In order to achieve this aim the study will follow the following format: a literature review, followed by a description of research methodology, then a discussion of results and finally conclusions.

## **Literature review**

### *Adventure tourism*

According to Wall & Mathieson (2006), tourism growth receives criticism, but most of the criticisms have not been concerned with the economic potential of tourism but rather with the negative non-pecuniary effects of tourism. It is also that the growth of tourism is

leading inevitably to modifications of the environment, which is the basic resource of tourism development. Adventure tourism is one of the fastest growing but least understood forms of international tourism. Its role in the economic development of remote locations and its impact on local society, the economy, and the environment are yet not fully comprehended (Zurick, 2005).

Adventure activities indicate a “quest for excitement” and they provide an opportunity to produce pleasurable from of tension and excitement, which provide and important contrast to the routines of daily life (Standeven, 1999). There is a great demand for this kind of tourism, and as the number of interested parties increase, the number of suppliers is also increasing to satisfy the demand for adventure travel. This has resulted in recent years with many operators doing business involving adventure activities.

Adventure tourism is a big business and millions of tourists each year participate in activities that fall under the “adventure” umbrella; there are also hundreds of thousands of companies working in the sector, according to Dunford (2008). This can be attributed to the fact that outdoor adventure pursuits have become increasingly popular and fashionable (Gyimothy & Mykletun, 2004: 855). There is a growing trend towards adventure oriented holiday behaviour in people seeking a more intensive leisure experience (George, 2004). Hudson (2003) elucidates that the most common motivators for outdoor recreation are fun, relaxation/getaway, health and exercise, family togetherness, stress reduction, experience nature/environment, and the thrill of learning.

Butler and Waldbrook (2003) mention that the rapid increase in the popularity of adventure, naturalist and outdoor travel, and the impacts of the increased commercialisation of these travel opportunities have placed great pressure on unique and significant natural resources. It is thus important to explore how sustainable the adventure industry can be in future and ways to make it sustainable.

### *Sustainable tourism*

According to the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT; 1996) a number of factors still limit the effectiveness of the tourism industry to play a more meaningful role in the national economy and toward sustainable development. Among some of the key constraints are that: tourism has been inadequately resourced and funded, the myopic private sector, limited integration of local communities and previously neglected groups into tourism, inadequate tourism education, training and awareness and the inadequate protection of the environment.



Dixon & Pretorius (2001) argue that sustainable development is a worldwide aim and on the agenda of many countries, especially the developing and least developed, mostly in Africa. South Africa is one of the African countries that has released a draft on National Strategy for Sustainable Development that currently serves as discussion document within public consultative process.

Dixon and Pretorius (2001) and Lozano-Oyola, Blancas, Gonzalez and Caballero (2012) defined sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It is often called intergenerational equality, the idea is that we should share natural resources not just with people who are alive on the planet today but also with future generations of the earth's inhabitants (Saep, 2010). Since 1994, South Africa has achieved far reaching-political, economic and social changes, with an increasing commitment to sustainable development. This was affirmed by the hosting of "The World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg" (2002), which placed poverty eradication at the centre of efforts to achieve sustainable development and reinforced the notion of development that aims for equity within and between generations (SA, 2006).

Among organizations that supports sustainable tourism development are *The International Eco Tourism Society (TIES)*, *The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)* and *The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC, 2009)*, the latter are an effort to come to a common understanding of sustainable tourism, and will be the minimum that any tourism business should aspire to reach. They are organized around four main themes: effective sustainability planning; maximizing social and economic benefits for the local community; enhancing cultural heritage; and reducing negative impacts to the environment.

According to Dymond (1997), the use of indicators of sustainable tourism provides an operational and cost effective means of supplying tourism managers with the information they require. The main rationale for indicators as mentioned by the Gstccouncil (2012) is that "specific knowledge is required to understand the link between tourism activities and its effects on the natural, built, sociocultural, and economic surroundings. Many authors have summarised many benefits of using indicators in other studies and many that has also leaned on United Nations World Tourism Organisation. Table 1 lists the main benefits of indicators from the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (2004), Miller (2001), and Delisle (2000). Among these benefits, many of them feature within GSTC and will be indicated by a quote next to them on the table.

**Table 1: Benefits of using indicators**

<b>Delisle (2000)</b>	<b>Miller (2001)</b>	<b>United Nations World Tourism Organisation (2004)</b>
Assess current state of tourism Analyse development of tourism Support policy and strategy decisions	Formation of policies Public awareness/problem acknowledgement (GSTC, 2012) Problem identification Policy evaluation Policy implementation (GSTC, 2012)	Better decision making (GSTC, 2012) Identification of emerging issues (GSTC, 2012) Identification of impacts (GSTC, 2012) Performance measurement of the implementation of plans and management activities (GSTC, 2012) Reduced risk of planning mistakes (GSTC, 2012)

On exploring this topic further, a number of research projects seem to have been done on rural tourism (Jose, Fierro, & Patino, 2011), profiles of the adventure tourism market (Van Onslen, 2010), risks in adventure tourism activities (Bentley, Page & Walker, 2005), adventure tourism in the future (Swarbrooke, Beard, Leckie & Pomfret, 2003), ethnic tourism application (Wall & Yang, 2009), community based tourism ventures (Sebele 2010), community tourism planning (Reid, Mair, & George, 2010) and community benefit tourism initiatives (Simpson, 2008). It also emerged that a lot of literature is available based on adventure tourism as an alternative form of tourism as conducted by Wearing and Neil (2009). In 2006, David Aabo conducted his thesis, entitled 'sustainable tourism realities: a case for adventure service tourism'; this however concentrated on adventure as service tourism only, whilst Choi and Sirikaya (2006) also wrote on the 'sustainability indicators for managing community tourism'. This was to develop indicators to measure tourism development within a sustainable framework and involved 38 academic researchers in tourism to provide input in developing the indicators. The literature above points to the fact that, little exists or less known on the literature available on the sustainable development for adventure tourism as a fast growing type of travel in South Africa, and as the aim for this study it is vital for such a study to be undertaken to make available a platform for the potential future planning and managing of adventure tourism industry in South Africa.

## **Methodology**

The research takes a quantitative approach where self-completed questionnaires were used. The survey was done at the Leisure and Recreation Association of South Africa (LARASA) conference held on the 11-14<sup>th</sup> March 2012 in Durban (International Convention Center, ICC) South Africa. The questionnaires were handed to the conference delegates at the conference, no=32. Researchers and academics who participated were from related fields and disciplines such as: leisure and recreation scholars; policy makers and professionals responsible for developing opportunities in leisure and recreation, tourism, sport and those with broader concerns to establish the legacy credentials of recreation projects and enterprises. The main themes of the conference were: recreation and leisure promoting healthy lifestyles in communities; recreation and leisure creating healthy and fit employees; boosting responsible tourism practices for sustainability; promoting best practice in recreation and leisure programming in the public service; creating green and liveable communities and promoting inclusive communities through therapeutic recreation.

An invitation to take part on the survey was announced at the conference and participants participated willingly and on their own.

### *Research instrument*

Senior academics from the department tourism management at the Tshwane University of Technology, along with the researcher, reviewed the questionnaire. The questionnaire was based on issues raised by *The International Eco Tourism Society (TIES)*, *The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)* and *The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC, 2009)*. Two types of Likert scale were used: Likert scale one with a five-point scale from 1 = (not important at all) to 5 = (extremely important). The second Likert scale ranged from 1 = (strongly disagree) to 5 = (strongly agree). Regarding Section C and D, participants were requested to respond with a 'Yes' or 'No' to a set of statements dealing with sustainable tourism.

A Likert scale is, according to the Business Dictionary (2012), a method of ascribing quantitative value to qualitative data, to make it amenable to statistical analysis. A numerical value is assigned to each potential choice and a mean figure for all the responses is computed at the end of the evaluation or survey.

### *Analysis of data*

Data capturing was done by the Tourism Department's Research Team, and a statistical analysis of data was conducted using the IBM Statistics version 20 (Statistical Package for the Social Science) and included quantitative calculation of mean scores. A Fleiss Kappa method, which is a measurement of concordance or agreement and measures

agreements between all participants according to Stattools (2012), was used for MDGs and TIES on the significance of indicators. The results of the statistical analysis are discussed next.

## **Results**

The goal of the study is to compile indicators for sustainable adventure tourism destinations based on the literature review of *The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria*, *The International Eco Tourism Society (TIES)*, *The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)* which can be used by anyone who wishes to develop adventure tourism.

The following was achieved after the completion of the study:

- Develop a list of sustainable economic indicators for the development of adventure tourism.
- Develop a list of sustainable environmental indicators for the development of adventure tourism.
- Develop a list of sustainable social indicators for the development of adventure tourism.
- Establish if whether any of the participants who participated in this study have used sustainable adventure tourism development indicators before.
- Investigate if participants will be willing to use the developed sustainable adventure tourism indicators (SATI) in the future.

The relevance of this research study was based on the usefulness of the information to the developers of adventure tourism in South Africa, as well as making a useful contribution to the existing knowledge base. Below are the results as illustrated by means of tables and graphs.

### *Respondents' profiles*

More female respondents took part on the survey compared to males as illustrated on Table 1. Most respondents were South Africans, followed by good representation of those from other African states and a few from North and South America. The majority of respondents were between the ages of 21 to 40 years followed by the age bracket of 41-60 and 16-20 respectively. A significant number of the participants indicated they were in possession of a college or university qualification, followed by those in high school respectively. A good number also indicated they were employed, followed by students, unemployed and retired respectively.

**Table 1: Respondents profile:**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>%</b>
Male	37.5	16-20	21.9	High School	3.1	South African	59.4
Female	62.5	21-40	37.5	College or Varsity	88	Other African countries	37.5
		41-60	34.4	Other	9.4	North & South America	3.1
		Above 61	6.2				
<b>Occupation</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>GSTC</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>MDG's</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>TIES</b>	<b>%</b>
Student	37.5	Yes	21.9	Yes	38	Yes	40.6
Employed	56.3	No	34.4	No	37	No	46.9
Unemployed	3.1	Missing	43.8	Missing	25	Missing	12.5
Retired	3.1						

It was imperative to understand from the participants if they were familiar with GSTC, MDGs and TIES since the indicators they needed to rate were based on these iconic sustainable tourism organisations. Twenty two per cent (22%) of the participants, as illustrated in Table 2, indicated they knew GSTC as an organisation while 34% responded they didn't know the organisation. A 37.5% familiarity of GSTC can be noticed, with almost the same percentage not knowing what MDGs are. Just over 40% responded they knew TIES, while 46.9% are not familiar with TIES.

There were 39 issues on the questionnaire which were based on GSTC. Table 2 indicates the number of indicators that received a mean score of more than four from the 39 together with the percentage of participation. Out of those that receive mean score of four or higher, three dimensions of indicators were found and included economic (n=3 indicators), social (n=4 indicators) and environmental (n=9 indicators) thus making a total number of sustainable adventure tourism indicators based on GSTC fifteen in total.

**Table 2: Sustainable indicators**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Economic</b>	Implementing a long-term sustainability management system	4.03	44%
	Make sure artefacts are not sold, traded, or displayed, except as permitted by law	4.00	50%
	Guard against commercial exploitation i.e. sexual exploitation on children	4.28	66%
<b>Social</b>	Respecting local heritage	4.22	59%
	Measuring customer satisfaction	4.00	47%
	Contributes to the protection of local heritage sites	4.16	53%
	Respecting the intellectual property rights of local communities	4.06	47%
<b>Environmental</b>	Developing policies that favour environmentally friendly products	4.13	50%
	Measuring energy consumption and encourage the use of renewable energy	4.13	53%
	Measuring water consumption and adopting measures to decrease consumption	4.06	50%
	Controlling Greenhouse gas emissions	4.06	50%
	Re-using wastewater	4.00	50%
	Implementing a solid waste management plan	4.13	50%
	Minimizing the use of harmful chemicals	4.13	69%
	Implementing practices to reduce all forms of pollution	4.13	69%
	Contribute to the support of biodiversity and		

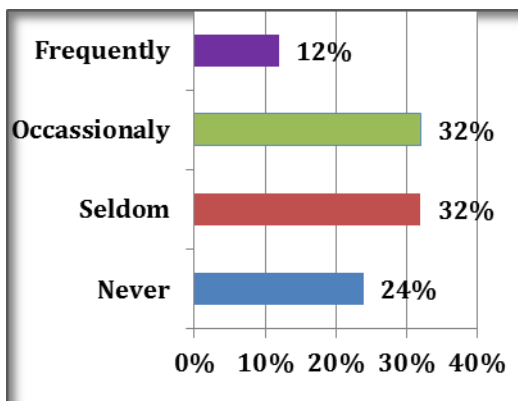
	conservation	4.25	69%
		4.00	46%
<b>MDGs &amp; TIES indicators</b>			
<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Significance</b>	
<b>Economic</b>	<p>Achieving full productive employment and decent work for all</p> <p>Contribute to the elimination of gender disparity in employment</p> <p>Creating partnerships between communities and local businesses to aid local communities</p> <p>Creating international networks and fostering sustainable adventure tourism practices in South Africa</p>	<b>= 0.654047</b>	
<b>Social</b>	<p>Educate children at schools the basics of tourism education</p> <p>Help in fighting dreadful diseases i.e. AIDS, Malaria</p> <p>Persuade governments to provide communities with safe drinking water and basic sanitation</p>		
<b>Environmental</b>	<p>Educating adventure tourists and tourism professionals can foster sustainable adventure tourism practices South Africa</p> <p>Supporting uniting conservation, community and sustainable tourism initiatives in South Africa</p> <p>Adventure tourism being an eco-friendly industry</p> <p>Contributing to the reduction of biodiversity loss</p>		

There were 15 issues raised under the MDGs and TIES, which the participants had to reply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’. A measurement of agreement on the indicators was established through Fleiss Kappa. Fleiss Kappa of 0.65 was found, meaning that LARASSA conference delegates who participated in the survey agree on the significance of the eleven indicators mentioned in Table 2 as follows: economic (n= 4 indicators), social(n = 3 indicators), environmental (n= 4 indicators). It is a substantial agreement among the participants in relation to the indicators rated, as shown below by Fleiss Kappa interpretation, that any agreement from 0.61 – 0.80 is substantial.

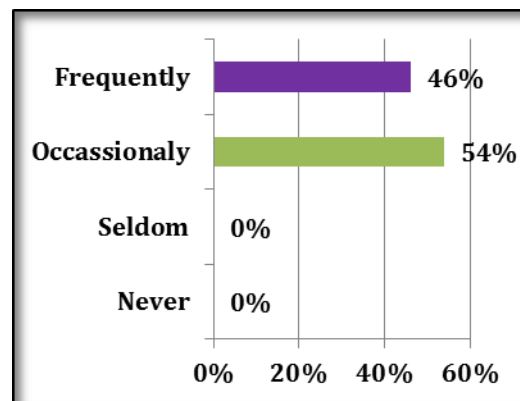
**Table 3: Fleiss Kappa interpretation**

$\kappa$	Interpretation
< 0	Poor agreement
0.01 – 0.20	Slight agreement
0.21 – 0.40	Fair agreement
0.41 – 0.60	Moderate agreement
<b>0.61 – 0.80</b>	<b>Substantial agreement</b>
0.81 – 1.00	Almost perfect agreement

**Figure: 1**



**Figure: 2**



**Do you follow sustainable management practices? Would you consider using SATI?**

As illustrated in Figure 1, a small proportion (12%) of the participants frequently follows sustainable management practices and 24% of the participants do not follow sustainable management practices. Figure 2 illustrates results of respondents who stated they will occasionally follow sustainable management practices if developed. Fifty-four per cent replied



that they will use sustainable adventure tourism indicators while 46% responded they will frequently use them if available at their disposal.

## **Conclusions and implications**

The literature review reveals mounting evidence that human and business activities are having profound effects on our global environment. It is now recognised that the tourism industry is not as clean as it was once profiled, and, in fact, it is contributing to environmental concerns ranging from global warming to adverse impacts of tourism on host cultures (Pfiser & Tierney, 2008). It was also found that South African adventure tourism is on the rise and these impacts do not leave it isolated. With all the negative impacts that are being attributed to tourism development, this study suggests the use of indicators as a paramount tool to planners in the South African adventure tourism industry.

As indicated in Table 2, a total of 27 (economic, social and environmental) indicators were developed from GSTC, MDGs and TIES. In practical terms the indicators proposed in this study are made up of an essential list of sustainable issues that can be a good starting point for a practical system that can be adapted to each destination and businesses. They range from basic issues affecting locals, jobs, commercialization, environmental use and benefits. It can also be concluded that there is good will from participants to use these indicators daily if made available to them (Figure 2). Adventure tourism managers are encouraged to consult the indicators proposed and select indicators that enable the implementation or development of issues related to social, economic and environmental conditions of adventure destination in their own destination.

According to Dymond (1997), the use of indicators of sustainable tourism provides an operational and cost effective means of supplying tourism managers with the information they require. The main rationale for indicators as mentioned by the Gstccouncil (2012) is that “specific knowledge is required to understand the link between tourism activities and its effects on the natural, built, sociocultural, and economic surroundings. By collecting and using data based on this knowledge, changes can be monitored and decisions made, to reduce risks to adventure tourism businesses and South Africa as a destination”.

In conclusion, it envisaged that through having the availability of sustainable adventure tourism indicators for South African destinations, a sound contribution to poverty alleviation is provided, by maximizing social and economic benefits for locals, enhancing cultural heritage and reducing negative impacts on the environment. It allows visitors to enjoy responsibly a true adventure blended with cultural immersion, while keeping it sustainable socially, economically, and environmentally, as an adventure tourism destination for now and for generations to come. This in South Africa is aligned to DEAT, which states that tourism can be an engine of growth, capable of dynamiting and rejuvenating other sectors of the economy (DEAT, 1996).

Some improvements could be introduced in future studies with indicators being developed for certain adventure areas/destinations which could be implemented with immediate effect due to their suitability of the area and its environment. More and better participatory processes should be encouraged when developing indicators and should involve all stakeholders, such as tourists, government officials responsible in the tourism ministries, locals and tourism business owners in the respective areas. This knowledge will ultimately result in improved decision-making which, when done from a sustainable management point of view, should result in a long-lasting positive legacy and a reserve of support for future events.

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