

Environmental Justice and Sustainable Tourism: The Missing Cultural Link

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Introduction

THE SAN FRANCISCO PEAKS IN ARIZONA ARE SACRED TO THIRTEEN INDIGENOUS NATIONS. These peaks provided a birthplace for many creation stories. They are also home to plants, soil, and pure water used for healing and ceremonies. A nearby facility, the Arizona Snowbowl Resort, also utilizes these same peaks for snow skiers. Due to global warming, the resort has experienced a decrease in revenue. As a result, resort management developed a plan to convert sewage water to 1.5 million gallons of snow per day, allowing the resort to stay open despite the warming weather. The Native Americans in this area are very opposed to contaminated snow being used on the peaks, as it would hinder their cultural practices and beliefs. The tribal nations also live off the land the resort is threatening to contaminate. This is one of countless examples where cultural justice is embedded in the issue of sustainable development. Tribal nations that have used the mountains for centuries have come into conflict with a local business using the mountains for financial gain (Vocal Nation 2007).

Unlike other examples that could be mentioned, this case has a good ending for the preservation of the tribal nations' cultures. After the U.S. District Court ruled in favor of the Arizona Snowbowl Resort in 2006, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals reversed the decision in March 2007 by ruling in favor of the "Save the Peaks Coalition." The Navajo nation's president, Joe Shirley, Jr., shared his sentiment on the final ruling: "This goes towards preserving our ways of life, preserving my prayer, my sacred song, my sacred sites, my mother: the San Francisco Peaks" (Arizona Native Scene 2007).

But what about the multitudes of other cultural issues that are important to cultural sustainability, a concept that appears to be poorly addressed in discussions of sustainable development and sustainable tourism?

Although sustainable tourism calls for environmental conservation and socio-economic well-being (WTO 2004), it does not clearly address the issues and challenges related to the fair distribution of costs and benefits of development among stakeholders. For instance, with respect to the distribution of environmental costs and benefits, it says little about how to ensure that they are distributed equitably between social groups, particularly those that may be disadvantaged due to race, class, or gender. Environmental justice principles offer valuable guidance here, but the concept itself has received little attention in sustainable tourism discourse. Only a few studies have addressed issues of inequity across diverse groups when it comes to the distribution of environmental benefits or negative impacts due to tourism development (Akama 1999;

Geisler and Lesoalo 2000; Floyd and Johnson 2002). Lee and Jamal (in press) therefore argue for the inclusion of an environmental justice framework in tourism studies to better address environmental impacts of tourism development—for instance, equitable access to natural resources and environments among social groups and communities.

These efforts are laudable, but continue to miss a valuable dimension: culture. Culture is integral to many forms of tourism (e.g., cultural tourism, festival tourism, indigenous tourism, agri-tourism) and the study of cultural impacts is an important area that focuses on aspects such as commodification, authenticity, interpretation, cultural survival, and heritage issues. But the topics of cultural justice and cultural equity are insufficiently addressed by tourism researchers, and important issues revolving around the culture of nature (e.g., human–environmental relationships) are barely addressed in tourism studies. This paper argues for incorporating “cultural sustainability” (CS) into the environmental justice–sustainable tourism (EJ-ST) framework that was recently proposed by Lee and Jamal (in press). Rather than attempt to develop a fully fledged conceptualization of cultural sustainability, we focus this paper on developing an important dimension of it: cultural justice in relation to tourism in natural areas. The outline we lay out below may be especially helpful in situations where environmental conservation and sociocultural well-being need to be addressed. Our paper makes an important contribution by specifically addressing tangible and intangible human–environmental relationships as an important aspect of cultural sustainability and cultural justice in natural area destinations.

We start by discussing environmental justice in the context of sustainable tourism. This is followed by the integrated (EJ–ST–CS) framework that we propose. Examples of relationships between humans and their biophysical world are forwarded, which also help to illustrate the importance of incorporating “cultural justice,” “cultural equity,” “cultural discrimination,” and “cultural racism” into the overall framework. Finally, we argue for the need to develop indicators that can serve as guidelines to protect or nurture these cultural relationships and offer related insights for policy and practice in ecotourism and management of natural/protected areas.

Environmental justice and sustainable tourism

In the context of tourism, increasing attention is being directed toward the sustainability of destinations and their resources as travel and tourism continues to grow in many domestic and international markets. The report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, also known as the Brundtland Commission), *Our Common Future* (WCED 1987), was a major force in directing governments and businesses to embrace the discourse of sustainable development. Although it attempted to reconcile (“balance”) economic development with growing concerns over global environmental impacts, little reference was made in the WCED report to tourism and only a few token references acknowledged the needs of indigenous communities. In 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (also known as the Earth Summit or the Rio Summit) focused on developing *Agenda 21*, a strategy to aid the public and private sector in the imple-

mentation of sustainable development. Subsequent initiatives, such as the *Globe 90* conference in Vancouver and *Agenda 21 for Travel and Tourism* (WTO 1997), drew on the WCED report and *Agenda 21* to introduce a new development paradigm for tourism: sustainable tourism. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) provides the following explanation:

Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social, and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems (WTO 1997:30).

Since the emergence of this new concept, sustainable tourism, research on the environmental and socioeconomic impacts of tourism on different types of destinations has increased. Yet even though equity is a grounding principle of sustainable development and sustainable tourism, very little research has been conducted to examine tourism-related impacts across different social groups within a destination area. Even in the environmental justice literature itself, little attention has been devoted to research on the distribution of environmental impacts among tourism stakeholders (residents) and between the social groups within them. Injustices commonly appear as economic issues that affect community labor and natural habits, the most powerful elements of social well-being (Ross 1998), but it is also important to note the effects of tourism development on other aspects of social well-being, particularly among

diverse social and cultural groups in the communities. Lee and Jamal (in press) identified a small number of studies that relate to issues of environmental justice in the context of recreation and tourism, for example:

- Inequalities for certain socioeconomic and racial groups with respect to the distribution of federally managed tourism sites in the southern Appalachians region, USA (Floyd and Johnson 2002);
- Greater water usage by tourists than local residents in the Bay Islands, Honduras (Stonich 1998);
- Exclusion of Maasai and other local residents from protected parks in Kenya (Akama 1999);
- State appropriation of indigenous and native lands and exclusion of relocated residents from enjoying the recreational benefits once available to them in conservation parks and reserves in South Africa (Geisler and Lesoalo, 2000).

Hence, Lee and Jamal argue that it is essential to incorporate an environmental justice framework into planning for sustainable tourism and ecotourism (Figure 1). Such a framework “provides important direction and guidance for addressing injustices related to human–environmental relationships, particularly with respect to disadvantaged, low-income, and minority communities” (Lee and Jamal in press). We summarize below some key concepts related to environmental justice that offer a valuable addition to sustainable tourism discourse. More importantly, we adapt these further below in our preliminary attempt to introduce the notion of “cultural justice” in relation to tourism in natural areas.

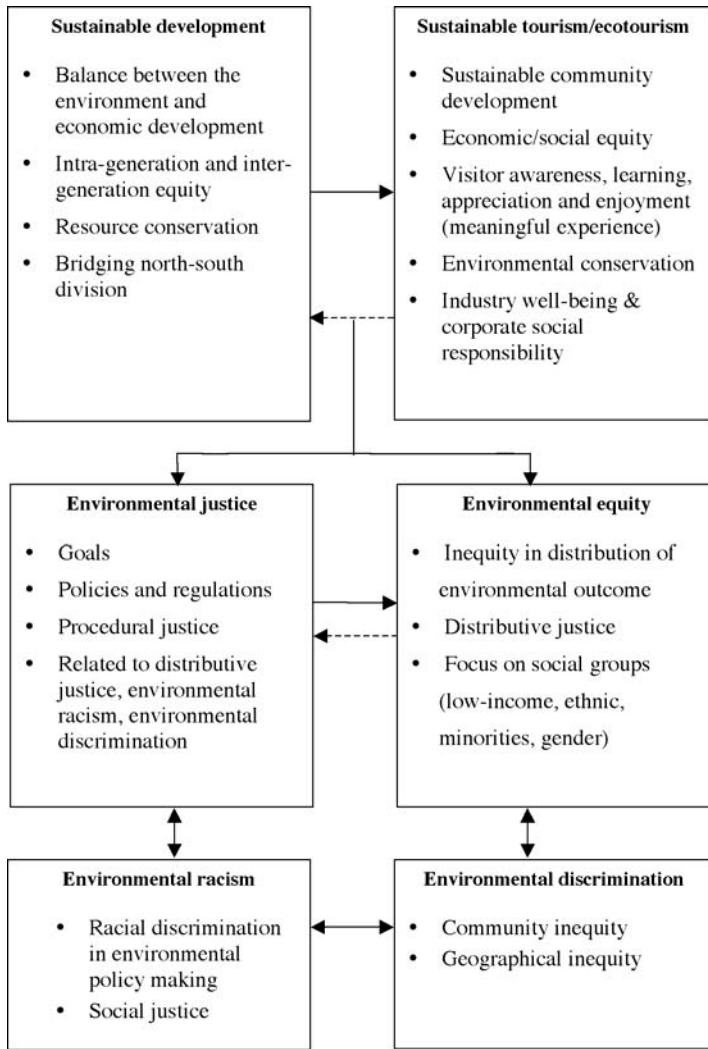


Figure 1. An environmental justice-sustainable tourism framework (source: Lee and Jamal, in press).

Environmental justice principles

The environmental justice movement gained momentum in the 1970s in the United States, driven by concerns about local health hazards brought on by toxic waste dumps, nuclear facilities, waste incinerators, and mining operations. Environmental justice is primarily concerned with the degree to which environmental risks and

burdens fall on low-income people and ethnic minorities. In the literature, environmental justice sometimes tends to refer more narrowly to matters of procedural justice, or the process by which environmental decisions are made about the use and distribution of environmental goods among diverse groups and individuals who may be discriminated against due to factors such as

gender, ethnicity, or income level. Table 1 below shows key terms relating to environmental justice.

An environmental justice framework can help tourism destinations by identifying and monitoring potential environmental injustices or inequities, and ensuring equitable distribution of environmental costs and benefits as well as fair procedures and policies for decision-making and participation. Unfortunately, both environmental justice and sustainable tourism lack a well-developed concept of cultural sustainability (CS), in spite of several calls to integrate this into sustainable tourism discourses and into approaches for managing cultural conflicts emerging in natural/protected areas (Craik 1995; Robinson 1999; Weaver 2005; WTO 1995). We propose to rectify this longstanding omission by approaching cultural sustainability from the perspective of “cultural justice,” which we argue below is a vital addition to the environmental justice

(EJ) and sustainable tourism (ST) framework.

Applying a EJ–ST–CS approach to natural area destinations

Cultural sustainability has been described as the ability of people or a group of people to retain or adapt elements of their culture that distinguish them from other people (Mowforth and Munt 1998). This definition is also far from complete, lacking reference to the equitable distribution of cultural costs and benefits among different cultural groups as well as long-term sustainability and intra- and inter-generational cultural equity (to follow the Brundtland Commission’s definition of “sustainable development” and the WTO adaptation of this concept to tourism). Cultural sustainability, among other things, needs to address the relationships between people and their biophysical world. This is especially pertinent in the context of natural/protected areas,

Table 1. Environmental justice for tourism (source: Lee & Jamal, in press).

<i>Term</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Environmental justice (EJ)	“Fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies” (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency).
Environmental equity (EE)	Equitable distribution of benefits and costs related to the environmental impacts of tourism development; it is strongly concerned with issues related to distributive justice (Lee and Jamal, in press).
Environmental racism (ER)	Unfair distribution of benefits and costs of tourism development among social groups as identified by race (Westra and Lawson 2001).
Environmental discrimination (ED)	Inequalities in the distribution of environmental impacts (Lee and Jamal, in press).

though clearly one cannot ignore this in urban settings (where urban parks, greenways, gardens, arboretums, and other green spaces offer opportunities for outdoor recreation and leisure). These relationships can be tangible (e.g., worship of fire, ritualistic journeys and practices at burial sites, ritualistic preparation of food gathered from the forest/sea), intangible (e.g., mystical, spiritual, identity, sense of belonging, collective memory), or both tangible *and* intangible, such as myths and fables that become tangible when invoked in conversation (auditory) but remain intangible in collective memory until performative engagement occurs. As Jamal, Borges, and Stronza (2006) point out, human–environmental relationships constitute a phenomenological existentiality that contributes to a sense of cultural identity and personal as well as collective belonging. Figure 2 illustrates some types of human–environmental relationships that may be present in natural/protected areas. It is not meant to be a definitive list, but is a good reminder that people relate to their biophysical environment in ways that are not always easily identifiable or measurable in quantitative terms.

Inequities in the treatment of ecocultural goods and (human–environmental) relationships in natural/protected area destinations are noted in tourism studies. Examples include ecotourists being allowed to enjoy natural areas and obtain rich learning experiences while residents are restricted from accessing the areas and performing their cultural practices, tourism development taking place on sacred burial sites, or people being evicted from their ancestral lands to make way for national parks. Environmental justice principles are especially helpful to draw upon in order to address issues of cultural justice and cultur-

al sustainability in natural area destinations. It means attending to cultural impacts on low-income, marginalized groups, and diverse populations (ethnic, gender, etc.) and communities within the natural area. It requires, among other things, two important actions: (1) factoring human–environmental relationships and other potential cultural changes into the overall framework, and (2) ensuring effective participatory processes at the destination so those who stand to be affected by the development can make an informed decision on development projects and proposals (Jamal et al. 2006:165). In other words, an important step to ensuring cultural sustainability in natural area destinations is active involvement in planning and decision-making by those whose ecological–cultural goods and relations are being affected by tourism initiatives. Adapting environmental justice principles towards cultural sustainability principles offers a useful start towards addressing issues of cultural justice and equity in natural area destinations. For the purpose of this paper, we have adapted these cultural dimensions to direct attention to the often-ignored aspect of the sustainability of ecocultural goods and human–environmental relationships. The prefix “eco” is added to the cultural dimensions below to emphasize the natural area context; they can be applied to ecotourism and tourism in protected areas, as well as other nature-based settings:

- Ecocultural justice, the active involvement of low-income and minority groups in decision-making related to their ecocultural goods and (their human–environmental) relationships.
- Ecocultural equity, the fair (equitable) distribution of tourism impacts on the

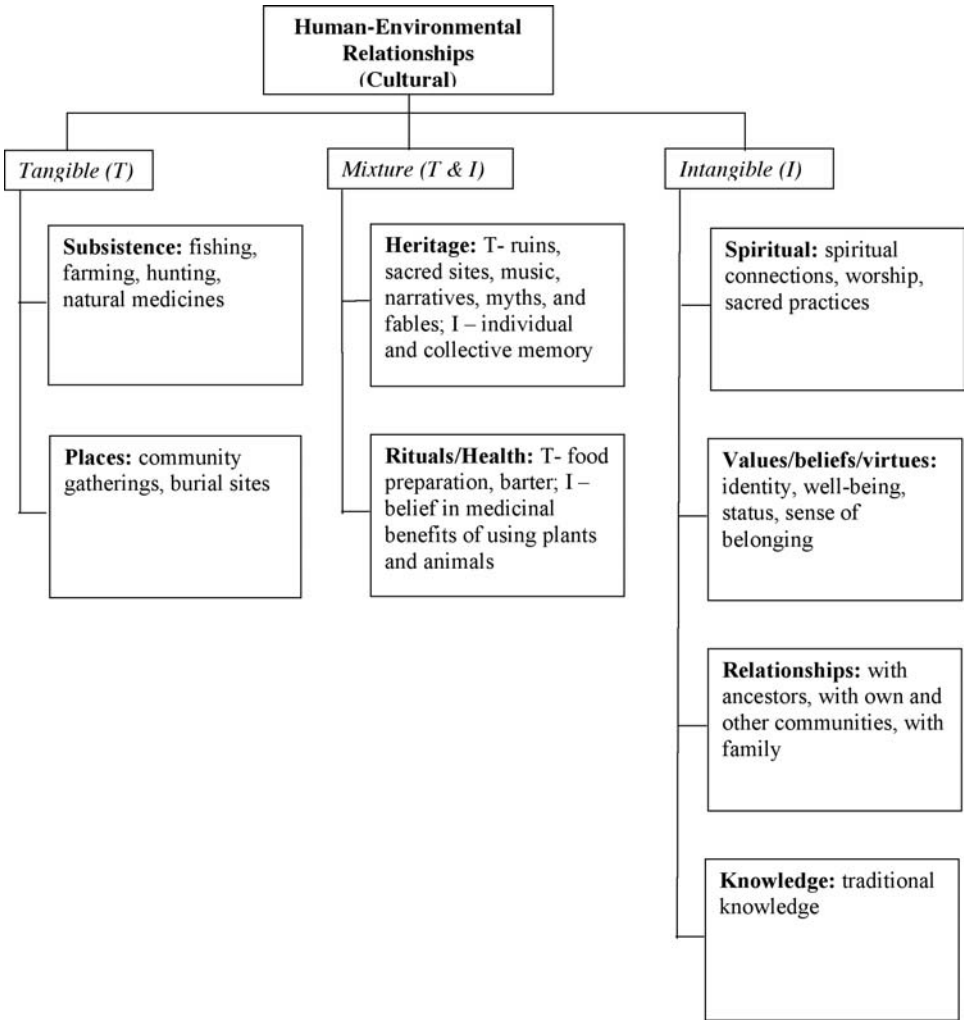


Figure 2. Human-environmental relationships (cultural).

ecocultural goods and relationships among different cultural groups.

- Ecocultural discrimination, disproportionate (adverse) impacts on ecocultural relationships and goods of minority groups.
- Ecocultural racism, the exclusion or prevention of minority and indigenous

groups from conducting their traditional (ecocultural) practices by tourism initiatives, laws, policies, etc. (Specific discrimination due to race has to be shown.)

Clearly, much work is needed to develop a fully integrated EJ-ST-CS framework.

In addition, indicators are required to monitor key items related to environmental justice and its cultural sustainability counterparts (cultural justice, ecocultural justice). The World Tourism Organization (1995), for example, provided a set of core indicators of sustainable tourism, none of which included a cultural dimension. James (2004) encouraged the development of local sustainable tourism indicators, but only to address economic, environmental, and social impacts. Sustainable tourism indicators were also developed by Craik (1995), Choi and Sirakaya (2005, 2006), and Ko (2005). Like the World Tourism Organization's later (2004) set of indicators, the ones developed by such experts have addressed social issues such as prostitution, crime, health, etc., but have tended to equate social impact with cultural impacts. Hence, such cultural issues as changes in ethnic identity and place-belonging tend to get ignored. In almost every instance, researchers working on sustainable tourism indicators and ecotourism indicators fail to take into account intangible cultural dimensions or the cultural link between humans and their natural surroundings (as noted in Jamal et al. 2006). Their argument is supported by Font and Harris's (2004) review of five ecotourism programs in which only two (out of 12) social standard criteria had cultural significance: respect for customary/legal rights of access by locals to natural resources, and contribution to tourist education regarding cultural issues. Table 2 provides an account of cultural indicators for sustainable tourism that have been proposed by several sources.

Developing robust indicators to monitor culturally related changes in natural/

protected areas is a crucial research agenda. A cultural justice approach as described above may assist in creating policies, laws, and regulations to protect diverse ethnic, low-income, and minority groups from inequitable treatment in development and conservation initiatives related to natural area destinations.

Implications for future research and practice

A more robust incorporation of cultural sustainability into an environmental justice-sustainable tourism framework for natural area destinations has important implications for the tourism industry. For tourism planners, this new framework can be applied toward developing codes of conduct, as well as certification and accreditation programs for ecotourism and sustainable tourism development. For policy-makers, an environmental justice-oriented framework that includes cultural justice as part of cultural sustainability can help to address matters of procedural justice (e.g., fair participation of cultural resource owners, protection of cultural rights, self-determination, participatory democracy, co-management) and issues of distributive justice (e.g., equitable distribution of costs and benefits from the use of cultural resources for tourism, access to sacred sites, etc.). For local residents, active participation in the development of the cultural sustainability framework and cultural indicators is crucial, as is their direct participation in development and conservation initiatives. It can help them to have control over which aspects of their culture and their ecocultural goods they would like to share, and how best to maintain those human-environmental relationships that they value (hence facil-

Craik (1995) Cultural indicators of tourism impacts	World Tourism Organization (2004) Cultural issues and indicators	Choi and Sirakaya (2006) Indicators for cultural dimension
Degree of economic dependence on tourism	Local satisfaction (% who agree that tourism is positive for the community)	Building/architecture (comparability of new constructions with local vernacular; types of building material and décor)
Distribution of economic benefits across a destination community	Maintaining cultural sites (% of tourist revenues which go to maintain or conserve key sites and structures)	Cultural site management (maintenance level; availability of site maintenance fund and resource; commodification; number of officially designated sites and its management)
Degree of public involvement and consultation in planning, policy-making, and management	Maintaining security (number of crimes affecting/involving tourists and locals)	Sociocultural fabric (retention of local customs and language; shift in level of pride in local cultural heritage; % satisfied with cultural integrity/sense of security; loss of authenticity and becoming impersonal)
Degree and forms of commercialization and commodification of the destination culture for tourists	Tourists well-being (% tourists who feel safe in the destination)	Cultural education (type and amount of information given to tourism employees; type of information given to visitors before and during site visits; level of sensitivity of interpretative materials and activities pursued)
Perceived environmental degradation, significant loss of amenity, or unacceptable modification of destination site	Health and security (% with waterborne diseases, % harassed)	
Sense of autonomy, self-confidence, and cultural identity of destination community	Sex tourism (level of response, organization for solution)	
Intrusiveness of tourism on destination community and/or its lifestyle		
Incompatibility of values and/or inability or unwillingness to accommodate the habits, lifestyles and attitudes of tourist groups		
Exacerbation of conflict and tensions within the destination community or between groups		

Table 2. Cultural indicators.

itating cultural survival as well). Awareness of, and support for, conservation may also increase.

Conceptualizing cultural sustainability, however, presents several challenges. First, as noted earlier, researchers frequently do not distinguish between cultural and social impacts, and tend to focus primarily on social issues (while sometimes calling them “cultural”). This makes it more difficult to call attention to ensuring that cultural sustainability is properly incorporated into

sustainable tourism. Second, cultural impacts and relationships are difficult to identify or measure—many are intangible and changes occur over a long period of time. This contributes further to an already complex domain. Third, very little attention has been paid to systematically identifying and examining issues related to cultural justice in tourism. In the case of natural area destinations, future research should focus on developing robust quantitative and qualitative indicators and monitoring schemes that

can track changes in ecocultural goods and human–environmental relationships due to tourism. Land does not just represent a

physical space, but rather the interconnected physical, symbolic, spiritual, and social identities of human cultures (Wilson 2003).

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