ANTI-ECOTOURISM
The convergence of localism and way of life

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Introduction
Ecotourism has consistently been associated broadly with the way of life of local people. Case studies report ecotourism’s application has supported a particular way of life, while others claim it has compromised or ruined a particular way of life that existed prior to its implementation (Das & Chatterjee, 2015). A post-hoc analysis of ecotourism links the case studies and has been applied and judged. The purpose of this chapter is to examine ecotourism within a different context. In this analysis, an application of ecotourism is attempted in the Big Horn region of Alberta Canada but rejected due to a combination of forces that are best described as localism and way of life. I argue here that it is as important to understand ecotourism’s critiques and case study results, as it is to gain insight into particular settings in which it is not likely to be embraced.

Anti-ecotourism refers to a context in which ecotourism is attempted to be applied but is ultimately rejected by a community. The preconditions of anti-ecotourism are shrouded in a layered tension, most likely found in the global north, and especially western North America where there are economic alternatives to ecotourism. Anti-ecotourism suggests that ecotourism is rejected in concept, reputation, and association because of what it proposes to bring in terms of change and threats to a way of life. The application of ecotourism is framed by a climate of tension, change, and disruption to a way of life that views its relationship to the land in traditional instrumentalist manner.

It is important for us to better understand the pre-implementation conditions of ecotourism. Ecotourism has long been associated with conflict, but we know little about the conflict specific to ecotourism at its early stages of development (Connell, Hall, & Shultis, 2017). Hunt and Stronza (2014) argue that there is a need for two additional stages to be added prior to Butler’s Life Cycle Model’s exploration phase. These stages would consist of “the absence of tourism” and “the arrival of early tourists.” These phases reflect the conditions of a community in which a tourism industry has yet to occur; its residents are naïve or unaware, do not have concerns and/or are not hesitant to accept tourism development (Hunt & Stronza, 2014). It is useful to learn how ecotourism’s critiques may manifest in a pre-implementation context as communities look to it as a potential economic development strategy. Rural and forestlands in western North America have experienced a general decline in the productivity of staple resource economies.
Many have and continue to look to nature-based tourism and amenity migration for revitalisation which may produce intra-community conflict (Gosnell & Abrams, 2011).

Finally, at the core of anti-ecotourism is a fundamental tension related to the urban-rural cultural divide and the clash of way of life that Gosnell and Abrams (2011) describe. However, it is likely to increase in significance as a constraint to the implementation of urban-inspired nature-based tourism in rural settings. These factors suggest that it is important for us to understand the meaning and conditions of anti-ecotourism which include the concepts of localism and way of life.

Localism in tourism and recreation studies is often discussed in relation to surf tourism. It is defined as a situation whereby local surfers need to defend their territory from tourists or others wishing to take advantage of the resource (Usher & Gomez, 2016). Localism is not restricted to surf settings and may be applied to any recreation resource context. Localism links with anti-ecotourism because locals may believe that ecotourism will bring tourists who will clutter or displace them from their cherished recreation areas. This may be especially true for recreation that is not known to be compatible with mixed use, such as motorized off-road recreation that, due to its noise pollution and impact on the land is perceived to dominate to the exclusion of other activities, creating an intense winner-loser scenario (Miller, Vaske, Squires, & Olson, 2017).

Anti-ecotourism is more nuanced than simple localism. Localism is only an option for those who can afford to reject the economic promise of ecotourism. Those who cannot will often make the trade-off of improved economic conditions for the presence of tourism. One of ecotourism’s tenets is that it can and should lift the economic wellbeing of communities (Fennell, 2008). This is a common aim in developing countries where ecotourism is often viewed as an economic savior. In the West, resource economies have dominated for decades and have created an entrenched but precarious way of life that provides decent wage employment therefore resistance to ecotourism is more likely. As Brouder (2012) claims, tourism is often viewed as a last resort for Western rural communities in economic trouble.

Way of life is a complex phenomenon that does not easily lend itself to precise definition. In fact, it is a concept seldom pondered except when it is perceived to be under attack, consequently it becomes an overriding and important issue. However, way of life is defined as the behaviour and habits that are typical of a particular person or group or is chosen by them (Collins Dictionary, 2020). It may include an important activity or resource that affects all parts of someone’s life (Merriam-Webster, 2020). For example, the sea or mountains contribute to form a way of life.

Early on, Wirth (1938) defined urbanism as a way of life that is the sum of many (urban) factors converging to shape a daily pattern of life that is different from rural life. A way of life is linked to individual or group identity. Sorge (2008) examines localist and cosmopolitan identities in highland Sardinia, Italy. He claims these identities are shaped by the epistemology of modernity and divisible by practices, values, and beliefs that lean toward the modern or traditional. He argues that both modern and traditional identities form separate ways of life that may coexist in the same community, but not without tensions. An understanding of way of life must also include the economy that allows for a particular style of patterns of daily life. The application of ecotourism within a community may involve a similar tension that arises from a ‘new way of doing things’ that supposes the old ways to be out of step with modern values.

Ecotourism itself had a similar effect on tourism when in its early days it rose as a critique of mass tourism. Ecotourism advocated moving toward a modern intent for the industry that focused on the wellbeing of local people over the interests of multi-national corporations. Ecotourism essentially involves “responsible travel to areas that conserves the environment and
sustains the wellbeing of local people…” (TIES, 2015). Ecotourism has a greater chance of success when the offering of a conservation-oriented economic development strategy based on inbound travel is viewed as enhancing the wellbeing of local people. We assume most communities that embody nature are amenable to ecotourism’s aims. But when a particular way of life does not prioritise an economy of inbound visitors and foreign notions of environmental conservation, ecotourism’s chances of implementation lessen.

This chapter presents literature that frames the tension surrounding ecotourism from the perspective of what residents may expect if it were to be implemented in their community. Later, I present a case study of an attempt to implement the Bighorn Country Provincial Park in Alberta, Canada. It was an attempt to implement a park system in a rural forested region of Alberta to enhance conservation and build a nature tourism economy. The case study embodies the concept of anti-ecotourism; its key features can be found in many other parts of the world. I close the chapter with a set of criteria to define the concept of anti-ecotourism.

Ecotourism and tension

The application of ecotourism can result in a myriad of tensions that span social, economic, and environmental issues. Ecotourism proposes a reorganization that will be viewed differently by individuals based on their values and beliefs within a meeting ground of hosts and guests characterised by tension (Schweinsberg, Wearing, & Darcy, 2012). Hosts often feel the threat of displacement, which can result in territorial resistance and manifest outwardly as localism. These concepts, along with the economic considerations that underpin a resource-based way of life, are discussed in the following section. In keeping with the concept of anti-ecotourism, the reader should consider the following concepts from the perspective of a community that is presented with the prospect of adopting ecotourism.

Place attachment

Place attachment is a term that widely captures various elements of the emotive aspects of the human-environment relationship. For example, Stokowski (2002) describes place attachment when referring to the feelings of attachment to particular settings, that are based on attentiveness and emotion. From a recreation perspective, Kyle, Bricker, Graff, and Wickham (2004) define place attachment as, “The extent to which an individual values and identifies with a particular natural setting.” Brehn, Eisenhauer, and Krannich (2004) states that place attachment can be especially evident within communities with high amenities, but it consists of two key dimensions involving “social ties particularly in high amenity settings, it may also involve attachment focused on physical attributes” (Brehn et al., 2004, p. 407).

Kyle et al. (2004) claim that for the individual recreationist, place attachment is largely a function of place dependence and place identity. Place dependence refers to the importance of a particular place or resource in providing the amenities necessary for the pursuit of a particular activity. Place identity is defined as ‘Those dimensions of the self that define the individuals’ personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, beliefs, preferences feelings, values, goals, behavioural tendencies and skills relevant to this environment (Proshanshsky, 1978, cited in Kyle et al., 2004, p. 124). Additionally, place dependence can lead to place identity over time (Proshanshsky, 1978).

Stokowski (2002) agrees that individuals give meaning to, and gain identity from, the subjective interpretation of place. However, she argues for a circular type relationship whereby
individuals are attracted to a place that holds potential to support one’s identity. Once there, a mutually understood identity of a place is generated through social discourse and action. It is the social creation of place that reinforces personal identity. Stolowski’s emphasis on the social aspect of place creation, recreation, and attachment is widely shared (Kyle et al., 2004; Brehn et al., 2004; Williams & McIntyre, 2002). Olive (2015) describes a similar phenomenon within the surf culture where local surfers develop a special relationship with the place that extends to stewardship, and believe they know what is best for the place. She refers to it as ‘Ecological Sensibilities,’ which is an ecocentric sensibility that transcends the narrow sense of self and human superiority.

Tension can arise when guests embody attitudes that conflict with their hosts. Ecotourism has been described as a conspicuous form of life politics that reflect a certain sensibility among Western tourists to make a difference to the societies visited. It is presented as a form of ethical consumption as an extension of the identity of the tourist, and presumed to be ethically better for the host region (Butcher, 2008). Tension may arise if the host community is not keen to have ethically minded nature-based tourists endeavoring to better their lives. It invokes a sense of superiority similar to the ‘modernisation theory’ critique of ecotourism.

Modernisation theory posits that there is a dichotomy between the modern and traditional, and that Indigenous people are pressured to abandon their traditional ways for the modern. It also contends that the route to change for developing nations is the route that developed nations have undertaken in the past, and that development will proceed in a linear manner following similar stages of development (Regmi & Walter, 2017). In essence, the application of ecotourism limits the development options for the community and diminishes its traditions. Modernisation theory is criticized for its ethnocentric focus whereby the practices that may seem odd and strange within economically poor non-Western nations are viewed as primitive and traditional, and therefore need to be corrected. Regmi and Walter (2017) present these criticisms in the context of developing nations, but its application to Western rural-urban contexts are equally valid.

Displacement

Displacement is understood to be about being ‘displaced’ from a place, economy, or position, but its disruptiveness on one’s way of life cannot be overlooked. It may present an unmooring of the self from daily patterns and relationships and from opportunities of a future that the individual believes they are entitled to. Way of life is not simply a pattern of activity or presence of a significant resource; it is an expectation of benefit from one’s environment. In that regard, the threat of displacement can be ever more significant.

Ecotourism-related displacement can occur when community residents are forced or coerced off their land generally to make way for a park or protected area (Cernea & Schmidt-Soltan, 2006). It can also occur when residents are displaced in absolute or partial terms due to rezoned protection status of key resources attributed to the ecotourism economy (Carrier & MacLeod, 2005) or when shut out of key business opportunities and jobs in the new economy (Das & Chatterjee, 2015). Marginalisation within the planning process by outsiders or in-fighting is another form of displacement (Lane & Corbett, 2005). For example, outside groups may enter into community planning in a disingenuous manner that is predominately focused on achieving an environmental goal over community economic wellbeing (Butcher, 2005).

Another form of displacement involves a restriction of activities deemed too consumptive for inclusion in ecotourism. Melitis and Campbell (2007) argue that ecotourism is defined as non-consumptive limiting the direct use or removal of wildlife through activities such as
hunting. They find this limitation problematic for a variety of reasons that involve cultural preservation or moral superiority and it can lead to increased tensions between locals and tourists when areas are regulated for exclusively for non-consumptive use.

**Territoriality and localism**

Place attachment suggests that an individual has a strong bond to a place based on emotive or cognitive dimensions Kyle et al. (2004). Territoriality is a form of social control of that place when an individual perceives it to be at risk (Usher & Gomez, 2016). Territoriality is based on three dimensions including ownership, boundaries, and regulation. It is an informal, citizen-driven phenomenon that can be linked to the identity of an entire community, not just a small group of individuals (Beaumont & Brown, 2016).

Ownership is thought to be psychological. For example, a group of dog walkers assume ownership over a particular part of a park, or motorbike users over specific trails. Boundaries can be understood informally as traditional uses of the land, whereby it is well known that certain areas are dedicated to a particular activity such as equestrian trails or logging roads that have served recreational uses. Regulation is the informal, or non-sanctioned, defense of the space from outsiders. In the surf community, it may include rules to show respect to local surfers, such as waiting on the shoulder of the break, it is also where localism may be observed. Usher and Gomez (2016) state that localism is the territorial behaviour of resident surfers over surf breaks, and it may manifest differently in each surf destination. Localism is the manifestation of territoriality and it is experienced from the mild to the extreme. Researchers have noted that localism in the surf community can be as benign as yelling profanities at outsiders through to extremely violent behaviours. However, localism is also demonstrated as environmental protection and stewardship (Usher & Gomez, 2016).

**Economic tensions**

In the West, rural communities have felt a threat to their way of life due to global economic restructuring. That threat has often led to the pursuit of forms of nature-based tourism to shore up or reinvent their rural economy (Gosnell & Abrams, 2011). Nature based tourism in Western rural contexts is often pursued as a last resort and sometimes portrayed as a panacea for economic issues (Brouder, 2012). In other cases, it is pursued as a strategy for economic diversification in resource-based communities (Connell et al., 2017) while others welcome tourism and amenity migration as a way to transition low value production land into higher value positional goods (Gosnell & Abrams, 2011). In each case there are tensions associated with the new economy.

Connell et al. (2017) examine the prospect of introducing ecotourism to the Robson Valley of British Columbia. The Robson Valley is a peripheral area that relies on a forestry staple-based economy. A peripheral area is geographically remote endowed with natural resources that lacks political and economic control over major decisions regarding its wellbeing and economic linkages. A staples-based economy refers “an economic relation within a region that historically depended upon the export of bulk, largely unprocessed commodities” (p. 176). It is based on a precarious dual dependency on the natural resource to produce raw goods and distant markets to purchase the commodities produced.

Carson and Carson (2011) examine contexts in which tourism may not be supported in the western United States. They characterize staples-based peripheral communities as having a government that tends to invest in the staples export to a point of overconcentration coupled
with a reluctance to promote other industries. Large external investors tend to manage and control many of important functions such as transport and storage and discourage the formation of smaller internal community-based economic linkages. It results in a diminished capacity to manage economic change, resiliency, and diversification. They create a culture of reliance on external corporations for the commercialization of the final products, and lesson entrepreneurial capacity within the region. They tend to import high-skilled labour, leaving the local workforce to remain low-skilled and consequently develop attitudes that favour low-skilled employment in staples production over general skills and education. They become locked into traditional occupations with little capacity for mobility and foster few incentives to obtain higher education. On the other hand, they position the tourism-ready community to be one that possesses an educated entrepreneurial community with productive internal partnerships.

Urban-based amenity migrants come with their own life politic regarding the environment and recreating in the outdoors resulting in a clash of rural and urban ways of life. While local residents can maintain a semblance of gatekeeping, amenity migrants tend bring capital which can skew the community toward change (Gosnell & Abrams, 2011). Tourism remains an important tool in the development and reconstruction of rural communities, but Brouder (2012) aptly states that tourism may appear to occupy a neutral space, but it does not.

**Bighorn Country Proposal, Alberta Canada**

In 2018, Alberta’s provincial government proposed the development of Bighorn Country as one way of diversifying Alberta’s economy through nature-based tourism. The Bighorn park proposal would be this government’s second major park development within a two-year period. The first was the Castle Wildland Provincial Park in the southern end of the province. Castle Park is set in an area dominated by ranching and crown land or unprotected land held by the government for a variety of economic purposes. Castle Park was presented as ecotourism-driven economic diversification and eventually approved but not without controversy. Some local residents protested additional protections and regulations on land they had come to rely on for motorised recreation (Weber, 2017). The Big Horn park process would be even more contentious and ultimately be rejected.

The stakeholders in the Big Horn park proposal included a provincial government keen to create additional parks prior to the end of its mandate. The New Democrat Party (NDP) government was viewed as occupying the left or center-left end of the political spectrum in a province long dominated by conservative governments. In the peripheral area, there is a community of rural towns that are reliant on a staple economy based on resource extraction, a small group of nature-based tourism operators and First Nations groups. Additionally, Yellowstone to Yukon (Y2Y) and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) were two environmental, non-governmental organisations (ENGOs) working alongside the government. The Big Horn area rests between two iconic national parks, Jasper National Park to the north and Banff National Park to the south and could complete an unprecedented contiguous space of protected habitat making it especially attractive to the ENGOs. The designation of Big Horn as protected space would also boost the provincial government’s total protected area from 15% to its target of 17%. The area had been a priority area for protection ENGOs (Riley, 2019). There were several previous attempts at an overarching land use recreation strategy for the area dating back to the 1970s. The 2018, process was initiated by the provincial government and actively supported by the ENGOs, but they soon encountered opposition from vocal elements of the local community (Legault, 2020).
The Bighorn Country park proposal encompassed 5000 square km of crown land along the Eastern Slopes of the Rocky Mountains. It is a beautiful landscape where the foothills meet the mountains. It contains rivers, lakes, forests, and habitat for numerous species, including rare animals such as grizzly bears, wolverines, and Athabasca rainbow and bull trout. Bighorn Park could easily transition into a world-class nature or ecotourism destination. It is located about three hours from international airports in the cities of Calgary and Edmonton (Figure 18.1).

Like many similar landscapes in the west, the Bighorn area is a contested space. It includes the headwaters of the North Saskatchewan River that provides drinking water for more than a million people in the Edmonton region. According to the provincial government, the management intent of Bighorn Country was to protect the headwaters and watershed integrity, conserve and maintain biodiversity, recognise Indigenous peoples’ rights and traditional uses, provide high-quality outdoor recreation opportunities, and support economic diversification and increase tourism opportunities (Alberta Government, 2018).

The management aim of Bighorn Country closely aligns with most definitions of ecotourism that emphasize environmental conservation, and social and economic benefit to local people. Where it differs is that ecotourism is to provide local people with control of the scale and benefit of the tourism development. Given that it was a top-down initiative led by the provincial government, it was never clear as to who would define and control the scale and benefit of any proposed ecotourism.

Alberta crown land has a long history of supporting the staple economies of timber and oil and gas extraction, along with the social role of supporting local residents’ recreation. In essence, it supports a local way of life that includes well-paying resource jobs and forest-based recreation. The historic absence of strict regulation meant that forest recreation leaned toward activities the government and ENGOs deemed unnecessarily destructive to the environment. The most contentious activities included motorised recreation involving ATV, motorbike and snowmobile use, and random camping (Riley, 2019). The latter refers to camping that generally involves RV campers and motorized off-road vehicles parked along a random river or lake area that is not a park or campground. It is randomly situated and as such it does not contain garbage, sewage, or water services. Random campers may camp for a weekend or longer. Tension would ensue if the park proposal was seen to restrict the economic and recreational patterns of local residents. In other words, if the park would challenge the way of life of Bighorn residents.

Bighorn Park was to be set in different zones that included provincial parks, wildland parks, recreation areas and two types of land use zones. Provincial parks and wildland parks focus on conservation with varying degrees of allowable human recreation use. Provincial Recreation Areas tend to be smaller and essentially cater to overnight camping and local tourism opportunities. A Public Land Use zone allows for the management of natural resources along with motorized recreation, as does the Public Land Recreation Area. The distinction of what uses were to be permitted and not permitted should have framed given the potential for conflict. If many old uses were to be eliminated, than it would be reasonable to conclude that local residents would rebel against the Bighorn Country proposal.

Nature-based tourism could be developed in all of the designated areas. Pre-existing uses such as off-road ATV and snowmobile use would be permitted in all zones on designated trails. Commercial forestry, and oil and gas exploration would continue to be permitted in both classifications of Public Lands. New petroleum exploration would be allowed in public lands and in all park zones, but with no surface access. Grazing would be allowed in all zones. Hunting and equestrian use in all zones would be permitted, with limitations.
in provincial parks and recreation areas, as they are nearer to human use (Alberta Government, 2018).

Economic activity such as commercial forestry, coal and metallic mineral extraction, and oil and gas would be allowed in both land use zones. Existing oil and gas, free hold mineral, and sand and gravel extraction would be permitted to continue in all areas. Grazing and commercial
trail riding would continue in all areas with permits. Recreational OHV activity and winter snowmobile activity would be permitted on designated trails in all zones. Auto access camping (or random camping) would be permitted all zones, but restricted to designated areas and prohibited in the wildland park zones. Hunting could continue in all areas with restrictions. Non-motorised recreation such as hiking, fishing, and climbing could occur in all areas, along with mountain biking and backcountry with permit. Overall economic activity would continue basically unchanged. Motorised recreation, including auto access camping would continue but restricted to designated trails and areas. Land uses would not be eliminated, but would be regulated. The park proposal included $40 million to develop visitor and tourism-based infrastructure (Alberta Government, 2018).

The geographic region in the proposed Bighorn Park is anchored by the communities of Rocky Mountain House, Nordegg north to Drayton Valley, and three First Nations groups in the region. Rocky Mountain House is the largest of the communities with a population of about 8000. The region is not homogenous, but in general it aligns with the Robson forestry community presented in Connell et al. (2017) and relies heavily on forestry and oil and gas extraction. Jobs are relatively well paying. The population is educated, but less so than the provincial average. Its main employers are the local government, forestry, transportation, and oil and gas companies. In 2014, the oil and gas industry throughout Alberta experienced a bust in its boom and bust cycling. It has not returned to pre-2014 levels. Global projections suggest it will not rise to a boom and it is now viewed as undergoing a structural shift, hence the imperative surrounding economic diversification.1

The park process was marred with controversy and tension. It is not feasible to provide a detailed account, but the summary is as follows. The park plan was introduced to the community as a proposal in 2018, while the controversial Castle Park plan process in the south of the province was still under way. From the start, many local residents rejected the park proposal. The Globe and Mail, a reputable national newspaper, quoted a longtime trapper as saying, “Nobody wants another Banff and Jasper … referring to the national parks to the south and north, respectively. Tourism is great, but Albertans need a place to go.” This was a consistent sentiment throughout the process. Residents felt the area belonged to them and tourism would disrupt that relationship. The government and ENGOs emphasized the conservation value of the proposed park including its value to the Y2Y habitat connectivity. The tone of the consultation changed by the end of 2018, when it was reported that a local opposition provincial Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) asserted that “the plan was a part of a foreign-funded plot to wall off the back country to Albertans who the region is their home.” Many viewed this type of rhetoric as flaming tensions through unsubstantiated conspiracy theories, but others embraced the ideas (Lewis, 2019). The process deteriorated when accusations of intimidation toward park supporters and government officials were made public. Shannon Phillips, then Minister of Environment for the presiding government, cancelled four in-person public consultation sessions due to those concerns. How much intimidation actually occurred was debated in the media, but a member of the community who owns a small ecolodge and supported the plan, indicated she was the target of intimidation on several occasions, including to the point of having cars of men park in front of her rural house (Zapach, 2020). Shortly thereafter, the provincial government lost the general election and a new United Conservative Government was elected. Following the election, Jason Nixon, former opposition MLA for area who strongly opposed the park, became the new Minister for Parks, and announced that the Bighorn Park plan was dead and would not go forward. He cited numerous concerns with the plan, but inadequate consultation was viewed as the primary reason the park plan was halted (Deroworiz, 2019).
Discussion

In this section, I examine the Bighorn case study in light of the literature and then return to the concept of anti-ecotourism. The Bighorn park initiative existed as a document of the plan and what it represented to the community. The plan focused on environmental protection but was careful not to introduce significant changes to local recreation and resource access. It essentially wrote in regulations that people were already doing. To many locals, the Bighorn park proposal is a symbol of curtailed future liberties more than present. The aim of the pro-park group including the former government and ENGOs was in keeping with a globalist approach to environmental protection. This approach plainly acknowledges that environmental protection is the priority and nature-based tourism is the way to support it (Wolf, Croft, & Green, 2019).

The aim of the anti-park group made up of dominant community voices, was to maintain their existing way of life, with little interest in environmental protection as presented to them by the pro-park group (Legault, 2020). Ethnocentric sensibilities can be observed in the approach of the pro-park group similar to modernisation theories’ criticism that ecotourism may presume the ways of the community to be old and in need of modernising (Regmi & Walter, 2017). Media reported that local residents believed they were already good stewards of the land. Whether local people were or were not good steward’s matters less than that they believed it to be true, and more so was the perception that they were being told by outside ENGOs how to properly care for their land. At a rally during the process, the director of the Alberta Off Highway Vehicle Association stated that people were not opposed to the preservation of the landscape, but to the process and how “you are being treated” … “you guys are being vilified because you simply disagree and that’s completely unacceptable in today’s society” (Grant, 2019). Olive (2015) noted a similar situation whereby through their deep place attachment, local surfers believed themselves to be the best stewards of the coastal area. Pro- and anti-park initiatives represent divergent life politics and what Sorge (2008) noted in the Highlands of Sardinia as the battle between localist and cosmopolitan identities. Shannon Phillips, then environment minister for the government referred to the conflict as nothing less than a culture clash (Phillips, 2020).

Local concerns that parks, regulation, and a burgeoning ecotourism economy would curtail future freedoms and access reflect practical concerns of displacement. Residents worried that access to their livelihood resources and recreation areas would be compromised due to regulation and ecotourism would bring crowds both well understood forms of displacement (Carrier & MacLeod, 2005). They argued the consultation process was flawed and their views were not adequately heard (Lane & Corbett, 2005) and though hunting was not eliminated, it was mentioned as a threatened right in light of the association of a park and its protections (Melitis & Campbell, 2007). The 2018 Bighorn process was a top-down initiative originating from the government. This is generally discouraged in the literature in favour of a grassroots, bottom-up approach (Butcher, 2005). Or alternatively, in the literature of a Lazy Approach (Pavelka, 2020), whereby community projects are only initiated once considerable trust has developed between partners, and the community itself defines the intent and scope of the project. However, bottom-up community-based tourism projects may not be equitable with dominant local actors silencing less powerful local actors (Lane & Corbett, 2005). This was the case with Big Horn, as dominant local anti-park actors shut out locals who supported the plan.

Territoriality and localism are generally directed to tourists accessing the recreation resource (Beaumont & Brown, 2016). In the case of Bighorn, tourists had not yet arrived en masse, so it was directed to the proponents of the plan. It manifested in denigrating the plan for its content...
and process and the potential for future restrictions, as well as in the intimidation of members of the pro-park group (Legault, 2020). Implied herein is that residents understood that if the area opened to ecotourism’s sensibilities of quiet non-consumptive recreation it would not mix with the local preference for motorized vehicles and random camping recreation.

Economically, the Big Horn is a resource-based economy similar to Carson and Carson’s (2011) description of the staple-based economy. It relies heavily on forestry and oil and gas extraction and thus far, generates enough local wealth to fend off a desperate or last resort shift to tourism as is common in other contexts (Brouder, 2012). This is a key factor that separates it from many other ecotourism contexts. Developing countries have little choice but to embrace any prospective development strategy that may lift it from poverty. However, during the planning process, the pro-park group commissioned an economic feasibility study to determine if a nature-based tourism economy could replace the existing resource economy as a mode of wealth generation. The studies’ results showed that it could equal current economic output, but it would require a shift toward entrepreneurial employment, which is not likely in an entrenched staple-based economy (Legault, 2020; Carson & Carson, 2011).

Anti-ecotourism occurs when ecotourism is presented to a community but is rejected prior to implementation based on protecting a way of life viewed as incompatible with the tenets of ecotourism. The Bighorn park proposal demonstrates this phenomenon in three important ways. The first is that the pro-park group heavily emphasised environmental protection and the anti-park group interpreted that as restrictions on their way of life. Second, the Bighorn staple-based economy still allows residents adequate financial means to maintain their way of life thereby eliminating the last resort context for accepting ecotourism. Lastly, Bighorn represents a contemporary concern of growing divisions of urban and rural ways of life compounded by a lack of trust in institutions. The plan was introduced by a progressive government and regardless of merit, it was not supported or trusted. These are significant barriers for ecotourism to overcome.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to present and demonstrate the concept of anti-ecotourism, not to discourage ecotourism, but to support its thoughtful implementation. Rejection of tourism by a community is not a new idea. Carson and Carson (2011) have demonstrated that there are places in the American rural midwest which are not amenable to it. Schellhorn (2010) demonstrated that ecotourism did not fit with the Senaru people in Lombok, Indonesia, because it was fundamentally not compatible with local adat customs, despite being encouraged by various NGOs. The concept of anti-ecotourism should be used practically by ecotourism’s proponents in government and civil society as a conceptual checklist prior to engaging.

Many years ago, I was invited to Fort Chipewyan, Alberta, to present workshops on ecotourism. Fort Chipewyan is a First Nations area in the heart of Alberta’s Oil Sands region on Lake Athabasca. It is small and isolated and suffers from the environmental effects of being downriver of the Oil Sands, but it has also benefited economically from it. I was confused as to why they would want to develop ecotourism given their financial position. At a large public meeting, I asked that question and an elderly man responded by saying, “We want to tell our story.” That makes sense; ecotourism is a good storyteller. Later, after working with other small resource-based, non-indigenous communities in Alberta also contemplating a shift toward tourism, I concluded that such communities would welcome tourism if it could
achieve three aims; to support local quality of life foster a minor tourism economy akin to economic diversification, it must tell a community’s story.

Notes
1 The mayor of Rocky Mountain House was contacted for an interview, but she did not respond.
2 The map is used with permission of Alberta Wilderness Association permission given March 12, 2020.

References


