Routledge Handbook of Ecotourism

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Publication details
Helen Kopnina
Published online on: 22 Sep 2021

How to cite :- Helen Kopnina. 22 Sep 2021, The role of ecotourism in nature needs half vision from: Routledge Handbook of Ecotourism Routledge
Accessed on: 09 Aug 2023

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THE ROLE OF ECOTOURISM IN NATURE NEEDS HALF VISION

Helen Kopnina

Introduction: Ecotourism and Half-Earth vision

In recent years, tourism has grown to one of the top industries (Ingles, 2005), increasing accessibility to the most remote areas for anyone with the time and money to travel (Stronza, 2001). The number of tourist arrivals worldwide has increased from 527 million in 1995 to over 2000 million in 2018 and is expected to grow with 3.5% by 2030, providing over 9% global economic activity (UNWTO, 2019). Simultaneously, many varieties of tourism have emerged, including adventure-, eco-, green-, or socially responsible tourism.

The International Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of local people and involves interpretation and education.” Ecotourism is normally associated with the protection of local flora and fauna and the economic and social development of local communities (Kiper, 2013). Ecotourists are stimulated by both “push” and “pull” factors, as they are “pushed” to flee “overcrowded, unpleasant conditions” at home (Honey, 2008, p. 12), and “pulled” by a quest for self-realisation, discovery, authenticity, connection with nature and with local people, serving as a bridge between different cultural backgrounds (Cohen & Kennedy, 2007; Teunissen, 2016). In this context, ecotourism is seen as stimulating local people to invest in and preserve their rituals, the process which oscillates between reification and invention (Picard, 1999, p. 16).

Where some forms of ecotourism offer viable economic alternatives to mass tourism, local communities have been known to move away from cultivated land, allowing nature areas to regenerate (Stem, Lassoie, Lee, Deshler, & Schelhas, 2003). Indirect tourism benefits create education opportunities and stronger associations with conservation attitudes and behaviors (Stronza, 2001; Stem et al., 2003). While ecotourism can be effective as a component of a broader conservation strategy (Stem et al., 2003), the presence of (eco)tourists has also in some cases caused over-development and over-building in protected areas (Leung, Spenceley, Hvenegaard, & Buckley, 2018). The model of ecotourism synthesized by Fennell and Weaver (2015) involves global but differentiated forms of different forms of ecotourism, or what they call ecotouria, along social and ecological lines.

In a broader sense, (eco)tourism has laid bare larger questions related to the human relationship to other cultures, to the quest for economic development, and environmental and
social change (Stronza, 2001). In this context, tourists’ relationship with the Nature Needs Half (otherwise known and hereby referred to as Half-Earth) vision deserves more attention. It has been established that to maintain viable populations of most of the Earth’s remaining species, around 50% of landscapes and seascapes need protection from intensive human economic activity. The Half-Earth vision, committed to pathways to resolution of anticipated new relational arrangements and potential conflicts, is championed by conservation biologists and social scientists, including Noss and Cooperrider (1994), Noss, Quigley, Hornocker, Merrill, and Paquet (1996), Terborgh et al. (1999), Olson et al. (2001), Svancara et al. (2005), Wilson (2016), Kopnina (2016), Cafaro et al. (2017), Dinerstein et al. (2017), Kopnina, Washington, Gray, and Taylor (2018), and Schleicher et al. (2019).

However, there is little research on the social and economic costs and benefits of Half-Earth (Fletcher & Büscher, 2016). The Half-Earth has been “ambiguous about the exact forms and locations of the new conserved areas being called for” (Schleicher et al., 2019). This chapter poses that some forms of ecotourism can potentially resolve the ambiguity of the Half-Earth vision as beneficial to both communities and the environment. The model of ecotourism that encourages the development of an international network of protected areas, starting with biodiversity “hotspots” (Cincotta, Wisnewski, & Engelman, 2000) and explicitly meant to promote positive socio-economic change fits well within this vision (Fennell & Weaver, 2015). By examining the Half-Earth proposal, the possible strategies of creating synergies between human and nonhuman interests on the ground, focusing on the case of ecotourism, are explored. This is hereby illustrated by two case studies from Mondulkiri, Cambodia and Vlieland, the Netherlands. Both case studies involved ethnographic fieldwork employing the methodology of participant observation, conducted by the author in August 2019 in Cambodia and December 2019 in the Netherlands. As will be outlined in this chapter, domestic ecotourism, including ethnic minority groups, offer a unique and distinct opportunity for a more socially and ecologically responsible tourism.

Wild areas and local communities

Critical social scientists (see an overview of their views in Kopnina et al., 2018; Piccolo, Washington, Kopnina, & Taylor, 2018; Washington et al., 2018) have pointed out that ecotourism is informed by a particular ‘ecotourist gaze’, a subject to fashion, taste, and the caprice of the affluent (Honey, 2008; Fletcher, 2015). This gaze, according to critics, is naïve in its romanticism at best, and at worst, it represents neocolonial, elitist, Western practices that drive displacement (Fletcher, 2015). The non-consumptive use of wildlife does not always pay the environmental dividends expected, for example, trophy hunting might (Nowak et al., 2019), the local people are not always major beneficiaries of ecotourism (Honey, 2008). It was also noted that ecotourists embark on transcontinental flights to move closer to nature, in effect negating the “sustainability” element of their activity (Saletta, 2014). Ecotourism has been criticised for the rebound effects, both in terms of unsustainable flights (Walters, 2002) and social and environmental costs. Tourism in nature areas necessitated transport and accommodation that can hardly be seen as “green” (Walters, 2002). Nature has become commodified as ‘resources’ or ‘services’ (Kopnina, 2017). The motivation behind ecotourism, whether it be big game viewing safaris in Tanzania or whale watching in Iceland, is to make the wildlife ‘pay their way’ (Blewitt, 2012). If the wildlife provides more income sold on the black market or consumed as bushmeat (Crist & Cafaro, 2012; Peterson, 2012), the motivation to preserve this “commodity” by local people becomes less pronounced, with practices like trophy hunting sometimes presenting themselves as part of ecotourism (McGranahan, 2011).
Critics have stressed that not only does ecotourism often hurt the environment, but it also neglects the poor, vulnerable, and minority groups (Lee & Jamal, 2008). Therefore, environmental (social) justice (Lee & Jamal, 2008) is undermined unless the local communities have an equitable benefit in ecotourism and unless nonhuman species and habitats are protected. Pointing out that tourism has become a multi-billion-dollar industry, profiting from ‘ecosystem services’ and ‘natural resources’, and nature spectacles for the benefit of wealthy elites, critical anthropologists and social geographers have problematized the practice of tourism (Stronza, 2001; Ingles, 2005), be it branded mainstream, eco-, green, or socially-responsible tourism. Fletcher (2015) adds that ecotourism is not as innocent as it appears, but a product of “profoundly Eurocentric”, “white, upper-middle-classes in postindustrial, predominantly western societies” (p. 341). As a panacea for this, Fletcher (2015) proposed the following:

Hence, while critics worry that the type of aestheticized, virtual nature experiences found in video games and television documentaries may diminish people’s concern for more mundane ‘real’ nature […] in point of fact, the opposite may be true: encounters with spectacular, hyperreal, virtual environments may enhance support for conservation more than sustained contact with a ‘real’ nature that is far more messy, dirty, and inconvenient. (Ibid, 345)

Fletcher (2015) might be right that in some cases development of environmental values can occur through video games and not through immersion in nature. After all, people who grow up next to or within a forest do not necessarily support its protection, while some urban-born city-dwellers might (Kopnina, 2015). Also, as wilderness is rapidly disappearing, there are less and less natural places where people can be “immersed” in nature. However, it is hard to see how video games are not part of the neoliberal economy and an expression of Western consumerism.

Fletcher’s critique of the ecotourist gaze as elitist (even though he is white and highly educated himself), tends to polarize Western and non-western values. There is evidence that biophilia (Kellert & Wilson, 1993; Kopnina, 2015), ecocentrism (Naess, 1973) and concern about future generations are not the inventions of Western “elites”, but a cross-cultural phenomenon (Piccolo et al., 2018; Washington et al., 2018). Animal rights and welfare have been part of traditional ecocentric, holistic animist religions (Harvey, 2005; Sponsel, 2013). By contrast, human rights discourse and preoccupation with economic benefits are part and parcel of Western, European Enlightenment perspective that has been internalized elsewhere through colonisation.

Also, the formation of new social classes of relatively young, caring individuals who attempt to connect beyond their immediate social network circles offers hope of contributing to a larger societal and environmental change. The negative portrayal undermines the positive potential of ecotourism to actively improve the living conditions of local communities and provide incentives for cultural preservation and nature protection (Stem et al., 2003; Kiper, 2013; Teunissen, 2016). The critics of ecotourism disregard the intention of care in situations where no easy choices can be made. These situations have to do with demographic and economic growth that push both wild habitats and local communities to the margins of industrialised development landscapes. Furthermore, the critics of “western practices” rarely consider issues of population growth (e.g., Olson et al., 2001) and displacement caused by industrial and agricultural development, with conservation and biodiversity serving as a scapegoat. To quote Eileen Crist (2015, p. 93):

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The literature challenging traditional conservation strategies as locking people out, and as locking away sources of human livelihood, rarely tackles either the broader distribution of poverty or its root social causes; rather, strictly protected areas are scapegoated, and wild nature, once again, is targeted to take the fall for the purported betterment of people, while domination and exploitation of nature remain unchallenged.

In this context, the “elitist” argument is used to silence those who speak for nonhumans and their habitats. What is more helpful, is distinguishing between a range of activities within both conservation and ecotourism activities that have the potential to contribute—or not—to environmental protection and positive socio-economic development. Fennell and Weaver (2015) helpfully distinguish between “hard” (smaller-scale, less invasive, more environmentally strict with FITs—free and independent travelers) and “soft” (larger, often superficially labeled “eco-”) types of tourism, with a comprehensive system of accreditation that could help determine more or less invasive or indeed “positive” forms of activity, are observed and which localities.

**Human relationship to the environment**

The human relationship with the environment and the human place in the environment has been a subject of scientific as well as philosophical debates. There is some archeological evidence that even in pre-industrial and probably pre-agricultural times, humans were already acting as key ecosystem engineers, playing an important role in shaping their surroundings (Turner, 1993; Barnosky, Koch, Feranec, & Wing, 2004).

In the idealised framing, today’s forest-dependent people have seen the keepers of traditional ecological wisdom of their ancestors, and their practices, such as traditional swidden farming, are not harming but sometimes even enhance biodiversity (McSweeney, 2005; Sponsel, 2013), suggesting the early humans or present indigenous communities did not hurt biodiversity. Following this, it is assumed that local beliefs and practices that influence the use of biodiversity are essential for understanding sustainable use and conservation policies (Van Vliet et al., 2018).

In turn, this belief is contested by evidence of early human-caused extinctions, such as in the cases from Madagascar to Northern Europe (Diamond, 1989). Also, in today’s monetised, industrialized world, ecological harm has been inflicted by different groups due to the expansion of the human population and extractive activities (Holt, Bilsborrow, & Oña, 2004) and modern hunting weapons (Nunez-Iturri, Olsson, & Howe, 2008). The romantic idea of the pre-industrial peoples living in harmony with their environment, protecting nature against the encroachment of extractive industries (McSweeney, 2005) has been challenged (Shoreman-Ouimet & Kopnina, 2016). There is also evidence that a global pattern of human arrival to new areas was followed by faunal collapse and other ecological changes, without known exception due to overhunting, fire use, and clearing activities (Burney & Flannery, 2005). Even traditional swidden farming is hardly congruent with nature conservation (Henley, 2011).

As for traditional hunting practices, its “sustainability” depends on the number of hunters. Simply, eight billion relatively large apex predators cannot be “balanced” with the availability of wildlife, derogatorily known as “bushmeat” (Peterson 2012) without intensifying agricultural production. While hunting for bushmeat in biodiversity-endangered or depleted areas has a different impact on the environment than, for example, production of consumer goods in Western countries, these actions collectively threaten environmental systems, in the former case on the local, in the latter case on the global scale (Crist & Cafaro, 2012). Approximately 67% of
terrestrial mammals are agricultural animals, 30% are humans, and only 3% are wild terrestrial vertebrate animals (Hamilton, 2017).

Half-Earth vision

Half-Earth vision aims to safeguard nature, halting mass extinction while providing long-term livelihood perspectives for local communities (Wilson, 2016). In addition to affording robust natural solutions to the ecological exigencies, the Half-Earth initiative charts a course toward a sustainable and equitable human coexistence alongside other living beings.

Pragmatically, it is doubtful that human survival and flourishing are possible with the rate of environmental degradation (Steffen et al., 2015; IPBES, 2019; IPCC, n.d.). In anthropocentric terms, it is doubtful whether a viable and flourishing human population of the present size can be sustained on biologically severely degraded earth, even in the short term. There is clear scientific evidence of human-caused climate change (IPCC, n.d.), and biodiversity loss (IPBES, 2019). Biodiversity loss is a problem for both present and future generations, e.g., people who depend on bushmeat and those who derive mental and physical health benefits from being in contact with wild nature.

Ecocentrically speaking, extinction reduces the evolutionary potential of the Earth’s living beings, as: “Death is one thing—an end to birth is something else” (Soulé & Wilcox, 1980). Also, the question of “resources” exposes not only to the social and economic impacts of the Half-Earth proposal on a single species (*Homo sapiens*) but also the impact of consumption on survival and flourishing of billions of individuals and collectives of other species (Piccolo et al., 2018; Washington et al., 2018). While Schleicher et al. (2019) take the impact on livelihoods of communities as a normative moral “good”, they leave out of consideration of the collective (ecosystem- or species-based) eco-, bio-, or geo-centric ethics, deep ecology (Naess, 1973), ecodemocracy (Gray & Curry, 2020), animal welfare and/or rights (Singer, 1977; Regan, 1986; Bisgould, 2014; Borràs, 2016), and the rights of nature (Chapron, Epstein, & López-Bao, 2019).

Negative impacts on communities (economic benefits or giving up a certain practice, “traditional” or “modern”) can at times be unavoidable and necessary but we have to weigh them up as they can hamper longer-term conservation efforts. The critics ignore the fact that the highest concentrations of biodiversity are found in areas with the highest rates of population growth (Cincotta et al., 2000; Crist, Mora, & Engelman, 2017). The aggregate problem is that the human population growth rate in biodiversity “hotspots” is substantially higher than the population growth rate (Cincotta et al., 2000). This suggests that human-induced environmental changes are “likely to continue in the hotspots and that demographic change remains an important factor in global biodiversity conservation” (Cincotta et al., 2000).

Ways forward: How ecotourism fits into Half-Earth

A more promising strategy would be balance impacts on species and future humans, stressing the likelihood that civilization cannot long sustain the loss of species that much less ambitious conservation strategies would likely cause. This does not negate the importance of the species themselves but provides a less strident and more sensitive framework. For example, regarding population dynamics and sustainability, there is the need not only to provide equal economic opportunities but also to consider family planning, support of women’s reproductive rights, and elimination of child bride marriages and unwanted pregnancies (Crist et al., 2017).

While some negative impacts on the economy or certain practices, whether “traditional” or “modern” can be necessary, we have to weigh them up against longer-term conservation
efforts. While not all traditional practices can be allowed when habitats and species are critically endangered, the level of protection proposed in Half-Earth vision will certainly permit practices that are concerned with non-consumptive nature consumption and will bar most corporate ventures, such as mining, logging, industrial agriculture, and also some types of “extractive tourism” from profiteering at the expense of the natural world and local people.

Solutions rest in potentially win-win scenarios that have to do with reducing human population pressure through the exercise of human rights, women’s reproductive rights through family planning (Crist et al., 2017), and greater engagement of scientists, particularly conservationists, with local communities. In this context, Schleicher et al. (2019) are right to point out that we need to take into account the social and economic impacts of any conservation proposals to assess “their acceptability and feasibility”. Pragmatically, conservation without engaging and convincing people about the benefits of nature protection can ultimately backfire, and ecotourists are well-positioned to engage in a dialogue with local people. The “ways forward” could include, as suggested by Nowak et al. (2019, p. 434):

Locally adjusted and bottom-up management practices, granting communities land titles, conservation-compatible agriculture, and coexistence approaches can also benefit communities and conservation more than trophy hunting. Also, tourism reforms could invigorate domestic tourism, minimize leakage of tourism income to foreign investors, and reduce the footprint of wildlife-viewing tourism through green development investment. Diversified nature-based tourism beyond photographing and viewing wildlife could incorporate survival skills/bushcraft training and agritourism, emphasizing local knowledge and cultural exchange.

Case study 1 elephant project: Mondulkiri

An example of ecotourism initiated by local communities and involving Indigenous people in the Mondulkiri project in Cambodia. The rubber plantation Varanasi in the Bousraa has erased much of the forest that used to be used by the indigenous tribe Bunong, who used to practice subsistence and more recently, swidden agriculture (Van der Eynden, 2011). The plantation has dispossessed the Bunong of their land and livelihood, leading to protests, and sabotage actions protesting economic development (Van der Eynden, 2011), with the clearing of Bunong’s ancestral land continuing (O’Byrne, 2017). Chrouet Kloeurt, a Bunong representative, stated in the interview: “If the company takes all the land, my children and grandchildren won’t have land. They’ll take all the land and cut all the trees” (O’Byrne, 2017).

By applying the moral economy concept to the Bunong, their traditional relationship to nature can be seen as “total”, while commercial activities of more powerful development agents tap the resources for commodity production for profit (Van der Eynden, 2011). However, simultaneously, the Bunong used to exploit elephants for agricultural work and later for entertainment in the tourist industry (Ma, 2013). While elephant rides generate a large income for indigenous peoples, which are increasingly becoming dependent on the global monetary economy, in many cases the “elephants are not receiving proper care” (Highwood in Ma, 2013; Figure 27.1).

According to one of the tour guides (see Figure 27.2), which has given an introductory presentation to a group of 25 tourists on August 19, 2019, getting new elephants for the sanctuary is a problem. Aside from aiming to keep the forest as a sanctuary for elephants that the organisation can buy from the mahouts or farmers, or circus operators, the NGO also aims to
start a breeding program. Most of the five elephants are presently too old (above forty) except for one female, and the NGO tries to rent male elephants to ensure that the younger female can produce offspring. Getting new and younger elephants is a problem as they become increasingly expensive (an elephant used to cost around 40,000 dollars, now more)—the animal parts, sold to Vietnam and China, are more valuable than the whole elephant. Also, some circuses and elephant rides are still interested in exploiting elephants for entertainment, with the number of wild elephants declining rapidly. According to the Cambodian guide, the Bunong used elephants for heavy farm and building work, sometimes physically abusing them. The elephants were not allowed to mate as pregnant females were seen as a liability, so new baby elephants were taken from the forest every time the new supply was needed. This was seen as an ancestor-held tradition. Some members of the Bunong communities, through employment at the Mondulkiri project, are starting to change their minds. The guide also reflected that local Cambodian operators of Mondulkiri project explain to the indigenous communities that a dead elephant or its parts give you money now, but ecotourism will do so for foreseeable future and will feed their children and grandchildren. There is the hope they can lend a young male elephant “to make a baby”—but first, an “elephant wedding” will have to be performed, including a relatively expensive money injection for a “party”, a sacrifice of multiple other animals, such as sheep, goats, or dogs (Figure 27.3).

Figure 27.1 “Mr. Tree story”
Figure 27.2 Mondulkiri project’s guides (from Mondulkiri project’s website)

Figure 27.3 Elephants bathing with tourists (by author)
Case study 2 (domestic) ecotourism: Vlieland

The Netherlands, where this author resides, is a densely populated country dominated by agricultural and urban development where a few natural areas find themselves squeezed between the farmlands and cities. The Netherlands has committed itself to nature objectives stated in the EU Biodiversity Strategy and thus indirectly to those in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD, 2019). A constant struggle between economic development and nature protection policies takes place (Kopnina, Leadbeater, & Cryer, 2019). In 2019, there were plans to disband protected status of natural areas in the Netherlands due to other economic interests (further expansion of agriculture and industry) and to avoid government regulation of nitrate pollution (Staatsbosbeheer, 2019). The reasoning goes that if there are no strictly protected areas, and Dutch farmers and builders do not have to “suffer” under limitations on nitrate emissions, there is no need for regulation (Leijten & Rutten, 2019; Winterman, 2019). While at the time of writing this article the plans to lift the protected status of natural areas are off the table, the Netherlands already has less protected nature areas than most other European countries (Winterman, 2019).

Simultaneously, urban areas in the Netherlands struggle with increasing numbers of tourists, attracted by the liberal drug and prostitution policies and associated attractions such as coffee shops and the Red-Light District, as well as “high culture” (Boffey, 2019). The case of Vlieland’s tourism discussed here shows how domestic tourism to the nature-dominated island can provide alternative income to residents and yet keep the natural areas intact.

The nature island of Vlieland in the Wadden area (Sijtsma, Broersma, Daams, Hoekstra, & Werner, 2015) offers as one of the “attractions” its gray seals, whose population has been relatively stable in the last few years (Brasseur et al., 2010). Vlieland is mostly visited by domestic tourists and a few German tourists. “Animal watching” including birdwatching, is marketed as one of the key attractions of the island (www.holland.com/global/tourism/destinations-regions/wadden-islands/vlieland.htm), feeding the local economy and helping motivate local villagers to preserve fragile nature (Figure 27.4).

One of the issues is that during seal watching some tourists approach the seals during the time they have and nurse pups (in December and January) too closely, and will at times disturb and scare away the mothers, and in some cases even cause them to abandon cubs altogether. However, despite disturbances, the Vlieland authority has reported a steady rise in the seal population. Local tourism opportunities in Vlieland also attract a wide range of local populations from the mainland, including, increasingly, minority groups, although “ethnic Dutch” nature tourism is more widespread (Loon & Berkers, 2008; Figure 27.5).

Discussion

While both Cambodia and the Netherlands are not directly known for their ecotourism, both countries demonstrate that certain types of activities that contribute to both habitat protection and animal welfare do attract tourists and contribute to local economies. Be it forest for the elephants in Cambodia, or the beaches for seals in the Netherlands, the habitats that sustain both local communities and wildlife offer an example of how places can be shared for mutual benefit, perhaps even as a blueprint for Half-Earth. While the ancient temple complexes of Cambodia and the marijuana coffee-shops of the Netherlands are unlikely to cease attracting massive tourism, alternative ecotourism presents an opportunity to incorporate both environmentally and socially responsible alternatives.
Figure 27.4  Gray seal (by Engelbert Fellinger)

Figure 27.5  Gray seal (by author)
The complexity of the relationship between eco-tourists and local communities, as well as “traditional” practices and culture preservation, comes to the fore. As the operators of Mondulkiri project suggested, creative engagement with, but also respect for local traditions, such as a compromise of an “elephant wedding” can be a good starting point. Tackling traditional beliefs about the elephants being the indigenous people’s pride, their heritage, part of their beautiful and unique land, or spirits of their ancestors, and, in a more utilitarian perspective, their chance of long-term financial security, may be key to mutually beneficial co-existence.

While in the idealised terms both ecotourism and Half-Earth vision are about sharing the planet and enriching social and environmental relationships, “win-win” scenarios are not always possible. Some high protection nature areas, for example, those with a high concentration of unique or endangered species, might need prohibition of any economic activities. As discussed previously, not all cultural practices can be preserved in the age of mass extinction. Also, while some human groups (typically, those that maintain high-consumption lifestyle) have a higher impact on the environment that poorer ones, or the ones that still maintain a “traditional” lifestyle (Sponsel, 2013), one may speak of collective culpability for climate change and biodiversity loss (Washington et al., 2018). While hunting for bushmeat in biodiversity-endangered or depleted areas has a different impact on the environment than, for example, production of consumer goods in Western countries, these actions collectively threaten environmental systems, in the former case on the local, in the latter case on the global scale (Crist & Cafaro, 2012). While the idea of Half-Earth supports sharing multispecies spaces, not dividing the earth literally in half, support needs to be generated for protection outside the reserve system. Ecotourist regions, as proposed by Fennell and Weaver (2015) can be helpful in this regard. The strategies for integrating various regions with sensitivity to local conditions but also, simultaneously, a commitment to sustainability objectives, can occur in different localities. These localities include agricultural lands (for example, through regenerative agriculture, retaining at least some biodiversity hotspots and corridors next to growing crops), roads (protecting roadside vegetation), or cities, which could accommodate more biodiversity through cradle-to-cradle designs, nature is not meant to displace or disadvantage local communities (Schleicher et al., 2019), but to co-exist with them.

**Conclusions**

Considering the discussion, ecotourists represent a very diverse group of people, not to be reduced to a generalized group of “elites”. While some of the ecotourists staying at the expensive resorts might be wealthy, others are young, idealistic backpackers, caring about local culture, and respecting nature (Cohen, 2003; Butcher, 2008; Teunissen, 2016). Some of these travellers include young people who are vegetarian or vegan (Delgado 2003), increasingly aware of the history of oppression both in terms of human and animal rights (Fennell, 2012; Fennell & Markwell, 2015), and attempting to ‘make a difference’ to the countries visited (Butcher, 2008). Some individuals even choose to remain childless to reduce population pressure (Fleming, 2018). It might be hypothesised that ecotourists, at least as a broad generalised category, are inspired by the ideals of contributing to a better future for human and nonhuman inhabitants of this planet (Cohen, 2003; Teunissen, 2016). Half-Earth suggests that environmental protection requires some economic costs, specifically banning certain types of larger commercial activities (thus restricting “economic elites” if the term is still needed).
There are significant differences between the newly emerging social classes, and the polarising focus on division between “rich” and “poor” countries can obscure the reality of socio-cultural, political, and economic changes. Examples of such change are the growth of middle classes in developing countries (Crist & Cafaro, 2012), or the shifting of consumption patterns, for example, from vegetarian/vegan lifestyle to more meat-eating diets in traditional Hindu countries (Delgado, 2003). Ecotourism can no longer be seen as unidirectional—from developed (rich) to developing (poor) countries—but as a multidimensional complex process. Further research needs to determine what types of ecotourism and under which local conditions can be seen to contribute to these ideals.

The context of ecotourism allows for a broader discussion of how the needs of the planet with all her inhabitants can be balanced with increasing demographic and economic pressures. The Half-Earth vision underlines conservation strategies that consider the needs of non-human species with that of the survival and health of future human beings. As discussed in this chapter, it is doubtful whether a viable and flourishing human population of the present size can be sustained on biologically severely degraded Earth, even in the short term. Proponents of the Half-Earth vision have suggested that conservationists, scientists, and policymakers should work in concert with local populations, not dividing the Earth in two, but living next to other beings without degrading them or their habitats. Promoting domestic ecotourism and protected area “ecotouriums” (Fennell & Weaver, 2015) are some of the examples of how this ambitious vision can be implemented. This chapter has focused on the cases of Cambodian and Dutch ecotourism that demonstrate the potential to successfully combine conservation, local economy, and animal welfare.

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