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### Professor Harold Goodwin:

**“Travel and tourism still lags behind some of the other sectors in retailing where organic, fair trade and eco-friendly products are much more evident on the high street” [\(p.3\)](#)**



### CLIMATE CARE'S Stella Bell:

**“Offsetting is not about planting trees, although there are a lot of companies out there who would try to convince you otherwise...” [\(p.6\)](#)**

## Director's Cut: Towards a free, transparent, democratic eco rating system

The usual, valid, criticisms against ecolabels are that they are expensive, opaque, that there is a conflict of interest, and that they are little more than marketing tools. We have been thinking and discussing these real problems with our Members and friends over the past 8 years, as ECOCLUB has matured and evolved. As Member numbers grow, we now feel obliged to start working towards an alternative & meaningful rating system. We are therefore introducing a pilot rating scheme that will be free of charge to our Members, as transparent as possible, with minimum conflict of interest, which will hopefully be much more than a marketing tool to our Members. It will certainly be far from perfect, especially in its early stages, but in the dynamic & democratic spirit of the Internet, it will aspire to constantly improve, to be open, participatory, interactive, constantly evolving.

Greenwashing *must* stop. So should the attempted marginalisation of the broad Ecotourism movement by an unholy alliance who would like to reduce it to 'a market segment'. Ecotourism as ECOCLUB defines it, is an Ecological, Humanist and Epicurean philosophy and practice, so beyond minimising environmental impact, our rating system will incorporate respect to human rights, employee rights and social responsibility. We believe in and focus on individuals, self-employed, and small tourism businesses, and would like to assist them in realising their power (in numbers) to change tourism, to understand and assume their responsibilities to society & the environment. Our rating system will acknowledge this preference, and we will remain indifferent to powerful tourism interests – those preferred by 'supermarket' ecolabels for financial reasons. Our independent effort will (try to) remain free of the political expediencies, corruption, bureaucratic indifference and inflexibility of many state and parastatal ecolabels. And it will be 'carbon-neutral' too – no plastic, no flashy brochures and gimmicks– all electronic. No unnecessary travel by eco-certifiers either, we will let ecotourists do the travelling and the inspecting. You will find more details about the new ECOCLUB Ecotourism Rating & Review system at <http://www.ecoclub.com/rating>

**Antonis B. Petropoulos** - [More Director's Cut](#)

## FEATURED EVENT



### North American Ecotourism Conference 2007

The International Ecotourism Society would like to cordially invite you to attend the 2007 North American Ecotourism Conference in Madison, Wisconsin . September 26-28th.

Looking to advance in your career, to build your professional capacity, to increase your professional tool belt, or to connect with industry experts? Don't miss the opportunity to gain practical tools, meet personally with industry experts, and connect with suppliers in your field!

Check out the conference website: <http://www.ecotourismconference.org>

# The ECOCLUB.com Ecotourism Awards - 2007

**ECOCLUB®, the International Ecotourism Club™ celebrates 8th Anniversary by holding its annual Ecotourism Awards and funding eco-projects in Rwanda, Ecuador and Cambodia**

ATHENS, GREECE (1 July 2007)

To celebrate its 8th anniversary, ECOCLUB®, the International Ecotourism Club™ announced today the results of its fourth annual eco-project competition, the "ECOCLUB.com Ecotourism Awards 2007" which fund community and environment-supporting projects, organised and implemented by tourism companies around the world.

Candidate project details were publicly posted online in May 2007, scrutinised by ECOCLUB.com Members, and the three winners were chosen democratically by Members through an online vote at [www.ecoclub.com](http://www.ecoclub.com) in June 2007.

Presenting the Awards at a live on-line ceremony, ECOCLUB Director, Antonis B. Petropoulos, said: "Building on the experience of the past three years and thanks to the enthusiastic support of our Members in 80 countries, this year we were able to increase the awards prize to Euros 3,000 (approx USD 4,000) so as to equally fund three eco-projects. Our awards are different in that they are not based on morally rewarding past performance, but on financially supporting future action. Winners are not determined by a panel of judges but in a transparent and democratic manner by ECOCLUB Members".

Following a tightly run contest between nine worthwhile projects, the 2007 winners are:

Rwanda Eco-tours Agency, Rwanda (Web: [www.rwandaecotours.com](http://www.rwandaecotours.com) )

Winning Project: Turning Gorilla Poachers into Farmers

Creating an alternative means to local people around gorillas' national park with an alternative livelihood that will absent them from wildlife poaching and the degradation of mountain gorilla habitat.

Details

La Selva Jungle Lodge, Ecuador (Web: [www.laselvajunglelodge.com](http://www.laselvajunglelodge.com) )

Winning Project: Pig Farm for Wildlife Protection

The difficult to balance carrying capacity of the lodge and the desires of local indigenous people to hunt fresh meat all come together in a pig farm.

Details

Carpe Diem Travel Limited, Cambodia (Web: [www.carpe-diem-travel.com](http://www.carpe-diem-travel.com) )

Winning Project: Plastic Bag Recycling Microenterprise

Creation of a microenterprise to collect and recycle discarded plastic bags by turning them into a range of useful products.

Details

All three winners thanked ECOCLUB Members for their trust and pledged an early implementation of the projects. In particular, Edwin Sabuhoro, Managing Director of Rwanda Eco-tours Agency, said: "In the name of communities around Rwanda's Parc National Des Volcans, this is absolutely good news, we cannot believe we were entrusted with ECOCLUB members sense of understanding, feeling and being part of us as we struggle to make mountain gorilla conservation a reality in Rwanda by empowering local communities with principles of adaptive management, that will not only give gorillas a future but also enriching local communities in Rwanda to be part of the whole cycle in the global ecotourism spectrum.

Eric Schwartz, President of La Selva Jungle Lodge added: "It has been my great privilege to be associated with the ECOCLUB for many years. La Selva Jungle Lodge in the Amazon basin of Ecuador applauds the work of the club and we are glad in our small way, this year, to take an active role in the good works of a singular organization with our winning proposal for measures towards sustainable ecotourism. In the spirit of the ECOCLUB we will forge ahead with all the resources we can muster."

As every year, the winning projects implementation and completion will be transparently presented and monitored online at [www.ecoclub.com](http://www.ecoclub.com), the world's most popular ecotourism business portal. The full implementation of the projects is a pre-condition for the payment of 70% of the Award funds.

For details on the ECOCLUB.com Ecotourism Awards

<http://www.ecoclub.com/awards.html>



## THE ECOCLUB INTERVIEW

### Professor HAROLD GOODWIN



**Professor Harold Goodwin** teaches Responsible Tourism Management in the postgraduate International Centre for Responsible Tourism at the Leeds Metropolitan University. He has worked as a consultant and researcher for the United Nations World Tourism Organization, the European Union, the UK's DFID, the World Bank, KPMG, Deloitte & Touche and the International Trade Centre. In 1998 he wrote a briefing paper on Tourism and Poverty Elimination which led to DFID's initiative on Pro-Poor Tourism at CSD7 in 1999. He is a member of the PPT Partnership ([www.propoortourism.org.uk](http://www.propoortourism.org.uk)) and has worked on tourism and local economic development in Africa, Asia, Europe and South America. He drafted the World Tourism Organization's 2002 Report on Tourism and Poverty Alleviation and is working on their PPT Manual. In August 2002 he co-chaired the WSSD event which produced the [Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism in](#)

[Destinations](#). Professor Goodwin has worked on national and local policy in Bhutan, The Gambia and South Africa.

**The International Centre for Responsible Tourism (ICRT)** (Web: [www.icrtourism.org](http://www.icrtourism.org)) at Leeds Metropolitan University is a post-graduate training and research centre. The ICRT has played a leading role in the responsible tourism movement through research and development work with the industry and government, and our students are playing leading roles in this movement. The MSc in Responsible Tourism Management is taught by Professor Harold Goodwin, Dr Xavier Font and Dr Janet Cochrane and visiting faculty, all of whom are active in tourism businesses, government, the media, campaigns, national or international consultancy or research. The course is taught by expert practitioners and we provide high quality tutorial support in Leeds and London - and where appropriate elsewhere. This course tackles the key issue of how to make better places for people to live and work; and for people to visit. The course adopts a triple bottom line approach to sustainable development – economic, social and environmental – and is market orientated, looking at both the supply and demand issues.

*The Interview follows:*

**☀️ If a Martian being landed on earth and read about the urgent need for Responsible Tourism, it would deduce that Tourism on this planet was largely irresponsible. Is Tourism irresponsible, compared to other sectors?**

The situation is mixed there are lots of different kinds of tourism in many different environments and cultures, one of the problems is that there is far too much crass oversimplification. If asked specifically about the UK I would say that travel and tourism still lags behind some of the other sectors in retailing where organic, fair trade and eco-friendly products are much more evident on the high street. Our campaigning has had success in the adventure and activities markets in particular – but there is a long way to go in converting the mainstream operators to a proactive approach.

**☀️ How easy is it for the layperson, but also the academic, to determine if a tour operation is responsible? And in this respect is Responsible Tourism Certification feasible? is it useful, or can it only be little more than a marketing exercise?**

One of the key principles of Responsible Tourism is transparency; the enterprise or NGO initiative has to be clear about what it is saying is responsible about its practice, it cannot hide behind an ecolabel. There is a broad agenda and no enterprise or project does everything which may be possible. Travellers and holidaymakers are increasingly aware of the issue and they can talk with waiters and chambermaids about wages, they can tell whether the towels are left on the rail or whether they get clean ones even when they do not ask for them. One of the strengths of the concept of Responsible Tourism is its respect for the diversity of the earth's environments and cultures. There is no one label for grading hotel rooms, there is a plethora of ecolabels mostly meaningless to the travelling public. A certification label is not the way to go

**☀️ You are currently launching the International Centre for Responsible Tourism in Leeds University, UK. Was this mostly in response to increasing demand from students, or from businesses? In fact, how easy is getting a job in responsible tourism, for someone who would have completed courses as yours? Some employers complaints that people who graduate from tourism university courses do not possess the technical skills, or even the basic knowledge required for the day to day operation of tourism businesses, such as geography. Conversely, the vast majority of tourism employees will never go anywhere near a university. Do you have any plans for them also, perhaps through distant, on-line courses?**

Moving the ICRT to Leeds Metropolitan has provided a much stronger base from which to build its work and the inclusion of Janet Cochrane and Xavier Font in the core team has given us a lot more capacity. Most of our students are mid-career or wanting to move into some form of responsible tourism. Our alumni include people, who have gone on to work in consultancy, to work in local government, for tour operators, in journalism, or wildlife tourism and national parks; some have established successful businesses. ResponsibleTravel.com was born out of the ICRT course when Justin Francis was a student, and I co-founded the company with him although I have since sold my shares and I am no longer involved. The ICRT is working with the UK Federation of Tour Operators on a training programme for the industry.

**☀️ Tourism and Responsible Tourism Academic institutions are increasingly getting involved in business research & projects. Is there a downside with responsible tourism research quality and agenda being driven down by private sector interests, rather than by higher ethics & responsibility, or is this simply a win-win process of "linking research supply to industry research demand"?**

As is often the case the reality lies somewhere between these two propositions, without mainstream commercial engagement we are doing no more than rearrange the deck chairs on the Titanic. Academia has the responsibility to demonstrate what can be done, to demonstrate what difference it makes and provide reliable information. Academia failed to do that for ecotourism and for community-based tourism. Too many nice stories, too much blah, blah – too little objective measurement or reporting of impacts. Academia is lagging behind the industry. At the ICRT we are pushing for properly researched examples of good practice with quantifiable evidence.

**☀️ Responsibility is a noble, hard to dispute principle, but how easy is responsible tourism to practice & attain? Is it essentially getting tourists to follow willy-nilly a certain practical code of conduct, does it require a higher level of education & ethics, does it involve costly adjustments and sacrifices by private tourism interests - higher salaries, donations, lower profits - or does it also require deliberate state policies & planning?**

Responsible Tourism is about all those involved – tourists, local government, hotels, tour operators in the destinations and the originating markets, journalists and communities – taking responsibility for doing what they can to “make better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit.” There may be additional costs, it may require that people improve their knowledge and practise – it all depends how the responsibility is being exercised and what is being achieved. Very often it pays off in a better product, a better experience, lower operating costs or better PR exposure. It is about changing the way tourism is delivered in ways that provide a better experience for the tourists and a better environment and living conditions for local people.

**☀️ Are large tour operators guilty-until-proven-innocent? Is there genuine interest in responsible tourism in large , mainstream tour operators or are they simply wary (and tired sometimes) of being labelled irresponsible, and lose sales? Are smaller outfits, by definition, or in practice, any more responsible?**

One of the problems about this debate is that it is little more than name calling. It is not the scale of operation that makes the difference, the questions is in what way is the business being responsible, in what ways is the business being irresponsible, what are its impacts? There is a lot of mindless criticism of all inclusives, it all depends on how the all inclusive is run. Some are good, some are less good, some have serious negative consequences, and we need to be able to tell the difference and work to make them all better.

**☀️ Some journalists endlessly 'worry' that travellers, or 'consumers' as they prefer to call them, are getting 'confused' by all the different brands of tourism and then they inadvertently oblige by trying to define these genres by themselves, adding to any confusion. With the clout of a respected tourism academic, would you say that Responsible Tourism is essentially different than Ethical Tourism, pro-poor Tourism, or Sustainable Tourism or even less successful terms such as Geotourism? Is there a natural cause for the proliferation of 'Tourisms perhaps due to competition by underlying organisations and interests - or could it be simply that the 'market' needs new 'Tourism brands' every few years. And if so, should we be expecting the next brand soon?**


I am often interviewed by journalists whose basic ignorance of these debates I find quite shocking. I think that we need to get travel and tourism on to the agenda of other parts of the papers where there is often more awareness of the ethical and responsible consumer debate. Travel journalists need to behave more responsibly about how they report and write – that said there has been a dramatic improvement in the UK as research by Cathy Mack for her MSc at the ICRT demonstrated. Responsible Tourism is about stakeholders taking responsibility for making the changes necessary to make tourism more ethical and sustainable. Pro-Poor tourism is not a product – any form of tourism can increase the benefits which it creates for the poor, pro-poor tourism is any form of tourism which creates net benefits for the poor. Full stop. It is that simple. Pro-poor Tourism is one of the ways in which a business can increase its responsibility. My first work on tourism was a three year comparative study on the impact of tourism at three national parks - two in Asia and one in Africa. What I learnt from that was that the good practices of ecotourism operators had little impact at those three parks because the mainstream industry used the same places, without making any significant contribution either to conservation or to the livelihoods of local communities. The reports are available on line at [www.haroldgoodwin.info/resources/vol4.pdf](http://www.haroldgoodwin.info/resources/vol4.pdf) What I took away from that work was the importance of




addressing the mainstream operators, we have to address the mainstream industry and we have to be able to quantify the impacts of different kinds of tourism in practise. For example I do not think that all-inclusives are inherently worse than non-all-inclusives. Circumstances alter cases. What matters are the net impacts- positive less negatives - of particular forms of tourism in practise in particular places. One of the key challenges is to be able to quantify and report the results of different initiatives. We need to move on from the theoretical to the empirical and we need to challenge the mainstream industry to perform better.

 **As someone who has been closely involved with responsible tourism from its birth as a term, what do you consider milestones in its short history?**

Responsible Tourism originated in the work of Joist Krippendorf in Switzerland, Auliana Poon and others developed and applied it in the South African White Paper on tourism development post-apartheid in 1996. I worked with Dan Rees at VSO, he is now with the Ethical Trade Initiative, and others in the nineties campaigning for change in the UK industry and in 2000 the Association of Independent Tour Operators committed to RT. We did the technical assistance for the South African government's guidelines for practice in 2001 and these became the sector planning guidelines for South Africa in 2002. In the same year we held the Cape Town International Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations as a side event to the World Summit on Sustainable Development and agreed the Cape Town Declaration. This remains the best most inclusive definition of RT, one which respects the diversity of the world's cultural and natural heritage and the diverse responsible efforts which are made to maintain it. In 2003 we launched the annual Responsible Tourism Awards sponsored by First Choice and now by Virgin Holidays. The next stage is the 5 year review in Kerala in March 2008 and the launching of a web forum to encourage whistle blowing and debate about irresponsibility.

 **Whose responsibility, whose ethics? Is it an accident that responsible tourism was born in the UK? Are perhaps current UK/ 'western' / 'free-market' / 'social-democratic' ethics, rather than - say - 'Venezuelan' ethics or 'World Social Forum' ethics -driving the responsible tourism agenda? Or by holding the Second International Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations in 2008 in the south Indian state of Kerala, a state famously ruled by Marxist governments for most of the past 50 years, you wish to prove the opposite? In the end, is responsible tourism an apolitical industry sector, or some sort of a loose social movement? Which of the two would be more effective?**

Responsible tourism was not born in the UK, its antecedent's are in Switzerland and South Africa. It worked in the UK because we campaigned and pushed over a prolonged period. In the UK it is primarily market driven, so is action on climate change. The UK like other tourist originating countries is unable to regulate what happens in other people's destinations – and nor should it be. There is also a case for government action at local level to regulate tourism impacts and much of my more recent work has been addressing that agenda. Unfortunately governments are reluctant.

 **Some sceptics argue, perhaps a victim of its own success, the agents of responsible tourism reform, i.e. the average tourist, does not have either the time or the will to feel accountable to the poor, the disenfranchised, the oppressed, during their 'sacred' 'hard-earned' holidays, or to comprehend local sensitivities. They mainly choose a responsible holiday on the grounds of price, novelty and exoticism, of being trendy and perhaps being compatible with shallow, mainstream political correctness back home, or for some work-related or egoistic motive, such as adding a catchy paragraph in a CV. Is this constructive scepticism that points that a lot more needs to be done to win the minds and souls of responsible travellers, or is it destructive, utopic cynicism, as there can only be a few considerate tourists, and businesses can not live on those?**

This is an impossible question to answer briefly and it is an area where we need much more research, but it is expensive research. We know that a growing proportion of the population aspires to have a holiday with responsible elements up from 47% in 1999 to 52% in 2001, same survey same question, same polling company. There is an aspirational trend, increasing numbers of people have the aspiration – if price and other elements are broadly comparable they'll choose the more responsible option. Why is a more complex question – wanting a guilt free more satisfying, more real experience. Most people want to feel better about themselves and to feel that they've done good, or at least done no harm. It is that human spirit that responsible tourism appeals to – and I think it will continue to appeal. This is not fashion it is a clear consumer trend. Travel and tourism companies will ignore it at their peril.

 **Finally, how satisfied are you with the progress of responsible tourism around the world thus far? How responsible is responsible tourism today? And can a responsible tourism business really be ethical and profitable at the same time?**

I am not satisfied. There is a long way to go, but we have made considerable progress, and the ICRT and others are creating more and more activist professionals all the time. When we did training for AITO on RT in 2001 one of the directors of a company who turned up said that he'd come along because the best applicant at a recent interview had asked about their RT policy – he now wanted one. There are many responsible and profitable businesses – RT is one of the ways of avoiding competing only on price, it can be a route to profitability. Responsible Tourism has many of the characteristics of a broad and diverse social movement.

 *ECOCLUB: Thank you very much*



## THE ECOCLUB INTERVIEW

### STELLA BELL

Business Development Manager, Climate Care



**Ms Stella Bell** has a diverse working background in the City of London, the Travel industry and the voluntary sector. With an MA in Tourism and Sustainability from the University of the West of England, she previously worked for an environmental NGO in Athens. Her day to day work involves selling carbon offsets to businesses and managing relationships with clients.

**Climate Care** provides services to help repair the damage human activities do to the climate. It does this by 'offsetting' the greenhouse gas emissions, such as CO<sub>2</sub>, from a person's or company's activities by reducing an equivalent amount of CO<sub>2</sub> on their behalf. These reductions are made through a range of projects in renewable energy, energy efficiency and forest restoration, which, it argues, not only fight climate change but bring benefits to communities round the world. Currently, one can offset emissions from flying, driving and household energy use. To find out more visit

[www.climatecare.org](http://www.climatecare.org)

**☀️ Please first tell us a few things about your specific responsibility within your organisation, selling carbon offsets to companies and explain why a company is better off partnering with your organisation, rather than trying to limit or offset their emissions directly?**

I'm the Business Development Manager at Climate Care with particular focus on the Travel industry. I sell offsets to businesses who, in most cases are making efforts to reduce their carbon footprint and want to offset what remains. We always encourage companies to offset what they cannot reduce, and fortunately, most of the companies we're dealing with have come to us as part of a broader strategy to look at the sustainability of their service/product. I would never suggest that it is better to partner with us than to try to limit emissions, reducing and offsetting should always go hand in hand.

When you're buying a holiday, almost certainly the biggest environmental impact of your trip is going to be the flight, but in a lot of cases there's no alternative but to fly to get to the destination. We recognise the enormous benefits of travel to destination economies, but believe that people have to do something to reduce their impact if at all possible and offset what they can't reduce.

When I went to the Association of British Travel Agents' convention last November in Marbella, for example, I travelled by train. When you're travelling within Europe, it's possible to do this (although I don't think there are enough financial incentives to go for the cleaner, greener option). I paid probably what amounted to five times more to travel there than I would have done if I'd flown, but I believe it's important to fly only when you have to.

Personally, if I travel by plane now (which I don't do lightly), I make sure that I make it a positive action by offsetting the carrier's average number of empty seats.

**☀️ There all sorts of objections (or excuses) to carbon-offsetting from right, centre and left. There are the greenhouse deniers who find no proof that CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are causing global warming, some others, who light-heartedly believe that some global warming is not a bad thing, or that fossil-fuels will some day run out, or technology will evolve and the problem will be solved. Some have moral problems: a comment in an online BBC forum famously compared it to "peeing in the swimming pool, but then buying FairTrade biscuits in the cafeteria afterwards". Others suspect that you may be taking travellers funds away from other charities (and travel charities) serving more pressing needs, such as poverty-reduction, hunger, disease, human and workers rights abuse. And some in the left believe it is yet one more capitalist fashionable gimmick for the globalised elites. Others, like planetstupid have even set up initiatives calling on people not to fly at all. If everyone is against you, surely you must be doing something right? And has some of the more valid criticism actually helped you improve your projects?**

I'm glad to say that the debate has now moved away from the greenhouse deniers, and anyone without a massive vested interest in the status quo accepts that climate change is happening and is human-induced. As you say, fossil fuels will one day run out, they're not an infinite resource, but there's more than enough under the ground that we can get our hands on to heat the globe to

a pretty uncomfortable temperature for civilisation as we know it, so I don't think that their running out is going to solve the problem for us.


The argument that technology will save us may be the case for some areas, but it seems unlikely that this will happen with aircraft. We are currently a long way off a technology that can provide enough lift to get immensely heavy aircraft into the air other than by using fossil fuels. Also with aircraft fleets, they are long term investments and any revolutionary changes that may come about that were not retro-fittable would not affect current stock - think about it - aircraft being built today will have an expected life-span of anything up to 40 years, so again this argument doesn't hold water.

When people get angry and say that there are far more important things that the world should be focussing on, like poverty alleviation, it seems strange to me. Trying to reduce global climate change is all about poverty alleviation - as the Stern report said, to make the necessary changes now could cost 1% of global GDP per year, if we leave it until later it could cost anything up to 20%. It's the developing world that will be hit worst when things get really hot, by investing now we're working in future poverty prevention rather than alleviation.

It's not only emissions reductions that are achieved under our offsetting scheme, it's enabling people in countries where they'd not otherwise be able to afford to, to go for the cleaner option - where in India or China it would be far cheaper to use more coal to generate your electricity, the introduction of the carbon funding from offsets sold makes the cleaner wind option (for example) financially viable.

Your comment about diverting funds from charities is an interesting one. It's one of the reasons why Climate Care is established as a company limited by guarantee. We're not a charity and don't feel that it should be the job of a charity to clean up your waste. After all, your CO2 emissions are the only waste stream you don't pay to have cleaned up. We also believe that this is something that people should be doing and we don't want offsets to draw on companies' budgets for charitable giving.

I wouldn't say that our critics have helped us improve our projects, although demand from customers for quality projects with independent verification drives us to drive for better standards.

 **Yet others have examined the way some offsetting schemes work, or rather do not work: From newly burned down forests masquerading as carbon-offsetting plantations, newly-planted trees actually emitting more CO2 than they absorb, offsets priced so as to actually encourage people to fly further so that they can pay more for the offset, choosing reforestation projects in the poorest countries so as to pocket the cost difference. So how can the bewildered traveller spot a fake scheme, and are there many of these? Is there perhaps a need for independent certification and verification of travel-related carbon-emission schemes and associated offsetting projects?**

Firstly, I'd like to make the point that offsetting is not about planting trees (although there are a lot of companies out there who would try to convince you otherwise). For example if you wanted to offset the UK's emissions for a year, you'd need to plant an area the size of about Devon and Cornwall with trees, and then ensure that they didn't die, become diseased, get chopped or burnt down for the life of the offset (anything between 50 and 100 years) - the following year you'd need to find another piece of land the same size and start again. This is not something we can plant our way out of, so we should be focusing our efforts - as Climate Care is - on funding renewable energy and energy efficiency which reduce dependency on fossil fuels. That said roughly 20% of global greenhouse gas emissions come from deforestation and land-use change, so we cannot avoid the issue of forest conservation.

Our integrity has always been under the scrutiny of our Steering committee - chaired by Sir Crispen Tickell and with members from organisations such as Forum for the Future and WWF, but as the market develops we recognise the need for internationally recognised standards.

The UK government has just launched a consultation on the voluntary offset market in the UK for that very reason.

It's essential that there is some kind of recognised standard, so that people know they're getting what they're paying for. There are already two standards for the voluntary market - The Voluntary Carbon Standard, and the Voluntary Gold Standard. Both are in early stages of development.

At Climate Care we have a project policy to put all our projects delivering over 10,000 tonnes of reductions through one of the two voluntary market standards - this will take time, but we're aware of the need for customers to have that independent stamp that we're really delivering those emissions reductions.

We will, however, continue to fund small scale projects that would not necessarily be financially viable with the added administrative costs of registering with these standards. Our integrity and transparency (we were the first, and possibly still the only voluntary offsetting company to publish our annual report and accounts) means we have a trusted name, and we believe that customers will continue to buy from these projects even though they won't have the stamp of the standards.

**☀️ A quick search online between competing offsetting companies reveals huge differences in calculating offsetting prices for the same routes using the omni-present & handy online CO2 calculators. Is this due to lack of meaningful data on plane capacities, engine consumption, and occupancy rates, or due to fraud?**

Calculating your emissions from your seat on the plane is not a precise science. There are far too many variables involved, and for this reason, Climate Care commissioned a report from the Environmental Change Institute (ECI) at Oxford University, to find a way to calculate them and explain it for the benefit of our customers. This report is available on our website.

The reasons for variations are numerous - different planes, seat configurations, freight, different fuel use etc. There's also what's referred to as radiative forcing. When you burn a fossil fuel at ground level with normal atmospheric conditions, you can calculate the CO2 emissions simply by taking the carbon content of the fuel and multiplying it by a figure, which is the weight of Carbon Dioxide which will be emitted when the carbon meets the oxygen in the atmosphere when it's burnt.

However, things become more complicated once you get into the upper atmosphere, because the air is thinner and you have the added complication of contrails and vapour trails (water vapour is a greenhouse gas) etc. We know that the global warming impact of these other factors is greater than the emissions from simply burning fuel at ground level, but we don't know precisely how much greater an impact it has.

The ECI looked all the studies available and decided that a factor of two was the most credible, so at Climate Care we use EU published average fuel burn figures, for average air craft and for the landing and take off just take the fuel burn emissions figures, but for the part of the flight in the upper atmosphere we multiply the fuel burn figures by two to take into account the radiative forcing. As I said, it's an imprecise science, but we feel that as long as we are transparent about how we have come by these figures, and these can be backed up scientifically through the ECI report, we are offering our customers the best we can.

**☀️ Looking at the supply side of the travel industry, is there interest in large travel corporations? In tourism officialdom? And are small outfits less or more interested in carbon-offsetting?**

In the beginning it was the smaller specialist companies that partnered with Climate Care, but the issue certainly moved into the mainstream when British Airways partnered with us last year and we produced an emissions calculator for their customers to offset their emissions.

With our launch with lastminute.com back in November, where, when UK customers are booking their flight the offset is incorporated into the booking process and you can't proceed without deciding whether or not you'll offset, we're really making progress. Lastminute has had a ten percent uptake since the introduction of the scheme.

We're also working with First Choice on a customer offering.

With the prominence of the issues in the media now, one of our smaller specialist companies has seen an increase from 20% uptake at the beginning of 2006 to over 40% in the fourth quarter of the year.

**☀️ Do you find there is adequate demand from air-travellers to support all carbon-offsetting schemes? Estimates talk about just 1 in 10 holidaymaker offsetting their flights carbon, have you noticed an increase, or is this percentage more or less stagnant?**

Absolutely, I think the demand from customers to offset is growing. I don't know if your one in ten figure comes from the lastminute.com post launch press release about uptake, but, as I explained above, where the option is there for people to offset, they're taking it. A recent poll by Amadeus one of the Global Distribution Systems (GDS) providers said that 25.6% of leisure and 26.5% of business travel agents are fielding increasing questions on the environmental impact of their trip. 12.5% of leisure and 14.3% of business travel businesses are now offering their customers the option to offset their carbon emissions. Our web sales over the last year have increased threefold.


**☀️ New travel carbon-offsetting schemes seem to be popping up every other day, particularly online. In the UK, which is way ahead in this sector, and as you hinted earlier in our conversation, the environment secretary recently announced that only offset schemes using officially recognised carbon credits will be awarded a new government stamp of approval. The officially recognised credits, known as certified emission reductions (CERs) are twice as expensive as the unregulated alternatives, the voluntary emission reductions (VERs). Notably only four companies met the government's approval and surprisingly your own was not one of them, although you had been recommended by travel authorities in the past. Do you believe there is a need for government regulation, or does it create a monopoly / oligopoly with the potential for corruption?**

At Climate Care, we're very much aware of the need for independent standards and verification of the emissions reductions and additional sustainable development benefits being offered by offset projects, and we're behind the UK government's consultation on this, but the whole thing has been misrepresented in the press. The government has only just launched the consultation on



this, and we're a little concerned that they have pre-empted the consultation by suggesting that people only buy delivered CERs (as you mentioned above).


At Climate Care, if the government's conclusion is that they are only prepared to give the 'stamp of approval' as you put it, to companies which are offering CERs, we will offer CERs to our customers should they want them - as these are part of the Kyoto Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), as you pointed out they are more expensive. CDM projects also tend to be larger scale and don't always offer the sustainable development and community benefits that the smaller scale projects do, so we will continue to offer VERs, for which, as I pointed out above, we will use the Voluntary Carbon Standard and Voluntary Gold Standards to independently verify.

 **Beyond air travel, critics have been picking on the association of some CO2 offsetting schemes with large, old-fashioned car manufacturers, who - critics allege, use carbon-offsetting as an alibi for not improving their engines so as to directly cut emissions - i.e. greenwashing. What is your view? Is carbon-offsetting a rather conservative / establishment response to an acute problem? Is it a 'smokescreen' that delays real change, or is it the art of the possible?**

I think in this question, you're referring to the partnership that we have with Land Rover. The launch of the partnership with Land Rover to offset the emissions from their UK assembly lines and the first 45,000 miles of every new car sold came after an announcement by Ford, the parent company, to invest £1 billion in developing a range of environmental technologies in the UK for the companies in the group.


Mike Mason's comment, Climate Care's founding director, in Climate Care's 2006 Annual Report answers you questions about this partnership very succinctly, I think: 'Whatever [Land Rover's] future plans, in reality there is nothing they could do to get emissions down faster than the combination of technology and public acceptance will allow. If they stop selling the vehicles others will snap up their market, and if they don't they are guilty of destroying the climate – a case of “damned if they do and damned if they don't”. At least with the offering of 100% carbon offsets (in effect compulsory for their customers) we collectively get the emissions right down immediately, and give the planet some more breathing space whilst technology, customers, and the newly sanctified politicians get their act together.'

I don't believe carbon offsetting is what's delaying change, it's a lack of political will that's delaying it. Mike Mason set up the company back in 1998 because he wasn't prepared to sit back and watch governments do nothing to address the real and growing threat of climate change. He would like nothing better than to reach a point where there was no need for organisations such as ours.

 **Why blame it on the consumers, who after all pay for the products and services, and not on the producers? Why for example, not pass a law to force airlines to offset their emissions? Would you object to that, or do you rather believe it is not feasible due to airline deregulation especially at a period of high oil prices?**

Whatever happens the cost of offsetting will ultimately be passed onto the consumer, and there are some companies now who have decided simply to include the offset in the cost of the holiday. We need to start pricing carbon into our everyday lives. We are all responsible for the carbon in our lives. That's why most of the travel companies that work with us offset their staff flights and then ask their customers to offset their share of the flight.

I'd love to see airlines offsetting the emissions from the empty seats (after all, it's not the consumers' fault that the airline doesn't sell all the seats) and then getting the customers to take responsibility for their share.

 **Finally, tourism, is by no means the only cause of air traffic pollution. Beyond other types of passenger air travel, there are increasing numbers of air cargo flights, and indeed military flights. Could your organisation or peers assist those sectors in offsetting their emissions?**

Absolutely, we are working with a number companies to look into their emissions from transportation of freight and are happy to work with them. I think military flights is something that governments will have to look at. It's a complex and secretive area, the full impact of which I think we're unlikely to ever know.

 **ECOCLUB: Thank you very much.**

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## Offsets & Tourism - Green action or greenwash?

by Kevin Smith\*

From Al Gore, to Coldplay, to resorts the world over, carbon offsetting is the latest way to express one's green credibility. The voluntary offset market is booming – already with revenue in the billions, market commentators say that it will quadruple in size in the next four years. But behind the feel good hype of 'having your carbon cake and eating it too,' what exactly are people being sold when they purchase carbon offsets and what sort of message are they contributing to the climate change discourse?

In the last year there has been a growing groundswell of criticism of offset schemes, to the point where the Carbon Neutral Company, one of the market pioneers, had its head office in London occupied in February 2007 by a climate change action group, who accused them of breeding a dangerous complacency with regards to climate change.

More and more individual projects are being exposed as being badly implemented, managed, monitored or not having as much benefit to the climate as they have been claimed. Up till now the market has been entirely unregulated. Offsets expert Francis Sullivan, who was instrumental in HSBC's attempt to 'neutralise' its emissions, commented that, "there will be individuals and companies out there who think they're doing the right thing but they're not. I am sure that people are buying offsets in this unregulated market that are not credible. I am sure there are people buying nothing more than hot air."(1)

Any eco-tourism outfit that associates itself with an offset company invariably risks being associated with the negative publicity that the exposure of such projects brings. For example, a UK-based African tour operator that prides itself on responsible travel policy 'offsets' its flight emissions through an offset company based in the UK. In March 2007, The Independent published an article showing that the offset company had "sunk thousands of pounds of consumers' money into a project without knowing how far it has cut carbon emissions." The project involved the installation of solar cookers in central America, but two years after the project had been undertaken it had not been audited, and money from the offset company had been merged with money from other sources so that it was impossible to tell exactly how much 'climate benefit' the offset funding had been responsible for.(2)

Many other offset companies and therefore tour operators have faced similar bad publicity. In April 2006, the Sunday Telegraph reported that 40% of the 8,000 mango saplings that a carbon offsetter had planted in southern India to offset the making of a pop album had died, with their project partner in India claiming that "They [the offsetter] do it for their interests, not really for reducing emissions. They do it because it's good money."(3).

These, and many other stories relate to the problems of individual projects, but there are methodological issues that relate to all offsets in that it is simply not possible to accurately quantify emissions reductions when you are reliant on very speculative scenarios in your measurements.

The credits that an offsets project generates are calculated by subtracting the emissions of the world that has the project in it from the emissions of an otherwise-identical possible world that doesn't. This last world represents the "baseline". The quantity of offsets credits that are generated and available to sell is equivalent to the emissions reductions beyond this baseline.

In order for the system to work, this baseline has to be accurately determined. Without an accurate baseline, sellers wouldn't know how much of their commodity they were actually selling, and buyers wouldn't know how much they were buying. The assessment by experts and verifiers of the hypothetical scenario without the project is, at best, informed guesswork. Many without-project scenarios are always possible. As Larry Lohmann points out in his treatise on carbon trading, "The choice of which one to be used in calculating carbon credits is a matter of political decision rather than economic or technical prediction."(4)

There are innumerable factors that could alter the baseline of the without-project scenario, such as socio-economic trends, future land use, demographic changes and international policymaking. As Jutta Kill from the FERN campaign network points out, "if the carbon market had been active in 1988 then East Germany would have been a prime target for energy saving projects. But how many predictions of baseline emissions would have included the fall of the Berlin wall the following year?" (5)

Much of the baseline speculation relates to the principle of "additionality" – that is, the idea that the project would not have happened without the funding from the offset companies. A report by the Royal Institute for International Affairs flatly acknowledges the "impossibility of measuring and defining savings that are additional to those that would have occurred in the absence of emissions credits."(6)

A more definite resolution to the question of whether or not a project would have happened anyway "seems as elusive as ever", according to Mark Trexler, a climate change business consultant. "There is no technically 'correct' answer," he concedes. "Never has so much been said about a topic by so many, without ever agreeing on a common vocabulary and the goals of the conversation." (7)

While scientists, using appropriate instruments and calibrations, are able to agree on how to directly measure real emissions, there is no consensus possible on how to accurately choose one genuine baseline out of the multitude of possibilities and

calculate the hypothetical emissions reductions from it. The lack of verification about baselines also means that there are enormous incentives and opportunities for companies to employ creative accountancy to choose a baseline that would result in larger numbers of sellable credits to be generated on paper.

Leaving aside the issue of unresolvable methodological issues, there is perhaps the most fundamental critique of the offsets industry is that it presents itself as a way that people can effectively deal with climate change while largely maintaining their levels of energy consumption. Instead of acknowledging the uncomfortable but necessary truth that we cannot responsibly persist with our current lifestyles, climate-conscious people are being encouraged to believe that with offset schemes they can continue as they were, as long as they pay money to absolve themselves of their responsibility to the climate. A New York Times article on ecotourism and offsets neatly sums up the idea, stating that “many travellers see carbon offsetting as a way to help tackle global warming without having to give up that trip to the Bahamas.” (8)

Despite the fact that many offset sites promote themselves as being the ‘final step’ after people have taken all the measures they can to reduce their emissions levels, this is often in the equivalent of the small print. In almost all cases the media promotes only the act of offsetting and not, except when responding to criticism, the less glamorous business of making lifestyle changes. And for every offset company that mentions that offsets should only be part of the response to climate change, there is another that will make sweeping claims that you “can neutralise the greenhouse emissions from your home, office, car and air travel in 5 minutes and for the cost of a cappuccino a week,” (9) and that “modern living needn’t cost the earth”(10). People who may wish to pay money to offset even the environmental costs of that cappuccino can visit [www.offsetmylife.com](http://www.offsetmylife.com) where offsets for every aspect of modern life are in development, from drinking coffee to watching television.

Furthermore, some of the environmentally unsustainable industries who are most dependent on the continued expansion of fossil fuel extraction and consumption are using offset companies as a means of ‘greenwash,’ providing themselves with a veneer of green credibility that they don’t deserve. It is possible to use ‘carbon branding’ through offset schemes to present the types of human activity that directly exacerbate climate change as being effectively ‘neutralised,’ and with no impact on the climate. So a major airline, which opposes aviation taxes and would never advocate that people simply choose not to fly unnecessarily can, through a carbon offsetter, present its climate-conscious passengers with the option of flying free from concern over the impact of their emissions. This shift to what is essentially an unregulated and disputed form of eco-taxation away from the company and onto the consumer has gained the airline an enormous amount of favourable publicity. Elliot Morley MP, the UK Government minister for climate change and environment, has actually urged all air travellers to consider offsetting their flights. (11)

In the time that airlines are partnering with offsetters, they have also been vigorously promoting the massive expansion of British airports, they have launched their own budget airlines to short-haul holiday destinations, and increased inter-city commuter flight services. Despite fuel costs, the past couple of years have been a period of expansion and profitability as much for offsetters as it was for airlines (12), both benefiting from the growth in online sales (13)

From flights, to four-wheel drives, to petrol itself, carbon offsets provide a false legitimacy to some of the most inherently unsustainable products and services on the market. What’s more, the costs of this purchasable legitimacy are often largely shunted onto the consumer, who effectively ends up paying for the greenwash. These companies also benefit because offset schemes place more of the focus on the consumers’ responsibility for climate change - at the expense of examining the larger, systemic changes that we need to bring about in our industries and economies.

There is an urgent need to stimulate public debate and participation in how we go about making those changes in a way that don’t disproportionately penalize any one sector in society. The tourism industry is as vulnerable to the changes that must take place as most other spheres of human endeavour. The fact is that the current drive for more airports, more runway expansions, more air travel and more package holidays is in terms of climate change a dangerous anachronism that cannot continue indefinitely. Debate is critical to stimulate proactive and creative responses to the need to slash emissions in the tourist industry. The existence of offsets is effectively stymieing this debate by promoting the false option of the ‘business as usual’ scenario and delaying the inevitable changes from happening. Businesses involved in ecotourism, as the environmental conscience or vanguard of the wider tourism industry have a responsibility to see beyond the glossy hype of offset schemes and recognize them for the ineffective marketing gimmick that they are.

*\*About the Author: Kevin Smith is a researcher with Carbon Trade Watch ([www.carbontradewatch.org](http://www.carbontradewatch.org)), which is a project of the Transnational Institute ([www.tni.org](http://www.tni.org)). He is the author of the report “The Carbon Neutral Myth – Offset Indulgences for your Climate Sins”*

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## Handling Tourism Events with Collaboration Agents

by Dr. Josef Withalm & Dipl.-Ing Walter Wölfel\*

### Abstract

Finding the right partner, requires a large amount of effort, not just in one's private life. Consequently, a solution to this problem in the tourism industry is to build Virtual Networks in order to organize tourism events. To build these networks, organizations must tackle two main challenges - concerning collaboration behavior, and tourism offers. Collaboration Agents, based on Semantic Web and Ontology, could solve these challenges. An EU-project, ECOLEAD, endeavours to solve issues for Collaboration Networks. Collaboration Agents, implemented by service providers on behalf of event organizers, would be able to roam the web, looking for appropriate partners, and evaluating their collaboration and tourism offers.

**Key Words:** Agents, CNO (Collaborative Networked Organizations), Collaboration, ECOLEAD (European Collaborative networked Organizations LEADership initiative), Ontology, Semantic Web.

### Introduction

After years of experience both in software engineering and transportation/tourism it was decided that ECOLEAD (ECOLEAD, 2004) would be highly beneficial for the tourism industry. Important results derived from ECOLEAD, conceptual as well as implemented, would enable organizations to build Virtual Organizations (VOs). In particular, the fact that upcoming events forced tourism organizations to build consortia, convinced us that ECOLEAD was the most appropriate approach to facilitate this event organizing process.

Nevertheless due to our experiences with all the tourism stakeholders we were aware that there were big deficiencies regarding the knowledge and usage of ICT. Therefore an attempt was made to exploit all the ECOLEAD results that were appropriate when organizing events.

In particular, Semantic Web approaches were applied to enable tourism stakeholders to implement their offers on their established websites or portals in two ways: 1) by identifying the collaboration abilities (which mainly comprise of business strategies, business models and business processes), and 2) identifying the tourism offers (which comprise of their accommodation facilities, packages, tickets).

Once the event organizers posted their offers on the web portal collaborative agents, it was possible to roam through tourism stakeholders' websites and evaluate the most suitable partners for the planned event.

The advantage of this solution is that tourism stakeholders are accustomed to providing a website, which is maintained / implemented by a service provider. So, such a service provider could also enhance / maintain this website adorning it with the necessary collaboration artifacts based on the ECOLEAD concepts.

### Relation to Existing Theories and Work

In order to reach the projected goals the following theories / issues were taken into account. One option was to introduce Semantic Webs, which could have a bright future in tourism. Tim Berners Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web, already identified the enormous potential inherent in this approach. Another option was to utilise Ontology that could, potentially, play an important role. Before introducing the theory of Ontology the challenges that would be encountered by applying it to the area of collaborative networks, were analysed.

Even though Ontology has proved useful in areas such as tourism, (see (RMSIG, 2006) & (Werthner, 2001)) the transformation to collaborative networks raises some challenges. One of the most serious challenges is the application of Ontology to sociological behavior. Ontology has meshes of meaning, i.e. standardized expressions of meaning. So, usually hierarchical structures of terms are



related to predefined associations. Of course the definition of subclasses is the most common way of establishing a hierarchy, i.e. a specialization of the terms. Some examples from the area of tourism may clarify these explanations, i.e.

- Travel type (cruises, adventure trips, wellness, culture, etc)
- Tourism intermediaries (travel agent, tour operator, agent, etc)
- Type of traveler (seniors travelers, travelers with children, disabled travelers, etc)
- Geographical entities (countries, regions, cities, etc)
- Accommodation (reservations, camping, hostels, private rooms, pensions, hotels, etc)

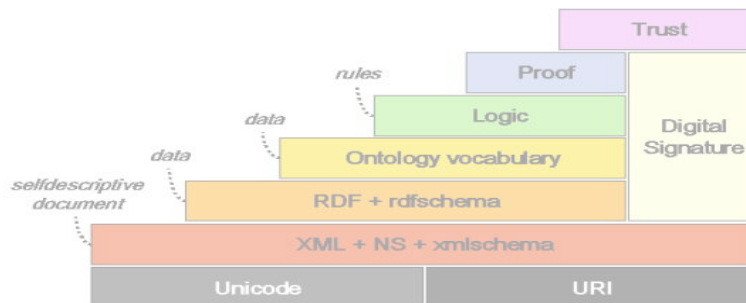
After these very accurate and impressive examples for tourism, the field of collaborative networks was examined. Here, business strategies, business models and business processes must be followed. For example, are trust issues components of business strategies? Respectively what are the components of trust issues (i.e. security, potential competitors)? Are these trust issue components 'is of' or 'part of' relationships? Are there really clear distinctions between these subclasses or do some subclasses overlap? All these issues must be dealt with, where as a special effort will be made to find out if RDF/OWL is the correct formal language for this area of collaborative networks.

**Semantic Web**

The goal of the Semantic Web initiative is to create a universal medium for the exchange of data where data can be shared and processed by automated tools as well as by people. For the Web to scale, tomorrow's programs must be able to share and process data even when these programs have been designed totally independently. The Semantic Web will smoothly interconnect personal information management, enterprise application integration, and the global sharing of commercial, scientific and cultural data. Facilities to put machine-understandable data on the Web are quickly becoming a high priority for organisations, individuals and communities. The Semantic Web will structure the meaningful content of Web pages, creating an environment where Software Agents roaming from page to page can readily carry out sophisticated tasks on behalf of users. The Semantic Web is not a separate Web but an extension of the current one, in which information is given well-defined meaning, better enabling computers and people to work in cooperation.

Three important technologies for developing the Semantic Web are already in place: eXtensible Markup Language (XML), the Resource Description Framework (RDF) and Ontology Web Language (OWL) as Ontology vocabulary. See following Figure 1.

**Figure 1  
Semantic Web Layers (Berners-Lee, 2001)**



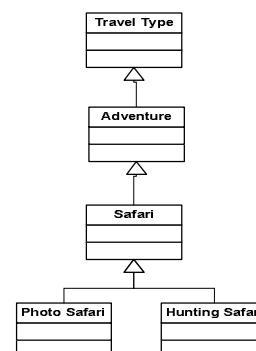
**Ontology**

Assume a user asks a Web Search Engine for *Safari*, whereby he means in fact *safari adventure*. He would get at least twenty two thousand answers for this query. These answers would include not only safari adventures, but also announcements of an internet browser named Safari, a model of Land Rover called Safari, a subscription service for electronic access to books, and so on.

**Figure 2  
Ontology Example**

Safari Example:

- A photo safari is a Safari.
- A hunting safari is a Safari.
- A Safari is an adventure.
- An adventure is a travel type.



This example shows that it is not so easy for a Software Agent in the Web to find suitable matches for every query. A solution to this problem is provided by the fourth basic component of the Semantic Web, described as collections of information, called Ontology. This means we need to create Ontology to solve our problem. Therefore all the relevant relationships in the travel domain must be defined by RDF/OWL.

So, the Semantic Web and Software Agent respectively can “understand” that by typing “safari” the user means not a browser, or a car, or a subscription service, but rather a travel type.

Ontology can enhance Web functions in many ways. It can be used in a simple fashion to improve the accuracy of Web searches - the search program can look only for those pages that refer to a precise concept instead of all the ones using ambiguous keywords. More advanced applications will use Ontology to relate the information on a page to the associated knowledge structures and inference rules as in our example above. Another example of a page marked up for such online use is available in Hendler, 2006. In addition, Ontology makes it much easier to develop programs that can tackle complicated questions whose answers do not reside on a single Web page.

### Research Approach

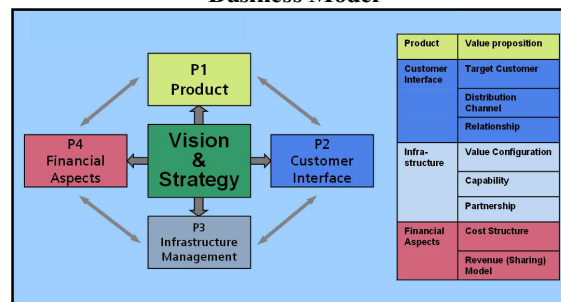
To apply the required theories - namely Semantic Web and Ontology - some methods/procedures are available and partially standardized. Ontology, as explained in chapter 2, is derived from AI and OO. The application in a sociological environment, as i.e. in Business Modelling, was not yet been researched. So an introduction of approaches, which were developed in (ECOLEAD, 2004) will be made. Furthermore a very interesting approach of Business Model Ontology, which Osterwalder (Osterwalder, 2004) published, shall be discussed. To make the web understandable to machines (i.e. Agents) we must also take into account RDF and OWL (see Figure 1).

Finally a rough introduction of the Collaborative Agents, which use Business Model Ontology, will be made. This Business Model Ontology will be implemented by enhancing the web portal through RDF/OWL.

### Business Models in ECOLEAD

ECOLEAD (ECOLEAD, 2004) undertook efforts to develop Business Models for each phase of a Collaborative Network. There, a Business Model template was developed (see Figure 3), which every SMTE (Small and Medium sized Tourism Enterprise) may consult, when considering joining a Collaborative Network, to find out if participation makes sense to them. Of course, it is not only Business Models that must be established, but also Business Strategies and Business Processes. And above all a SMTE must decide if Business Strategies, Business Models, and Business Processes are aligned to their company requirements.

Figure 3  
Business Model



### Business Model Ontology

Initially, collaborative networking organisations need Ontology to find partners to join a VBE (Virtual Breeding Environment), in which they will be prepared to form a virtual organisation. How can we evaluate potential partners and select the right ones? Of course business strategies, business models and processes must meet or at least converge.

In (Osterwalder, 2004) a Business Model Ontology has been developed which may be a very appropriate starting point for our discussion concerning Ontology. Osterwalder talked of four pillars - according to the Ontology theory - four classes, for which he created subclasses. Relations exist between these classes and subclasses, and each subclass or term is structured further by attributes. A brief overview of Osterwalder’s results follows.

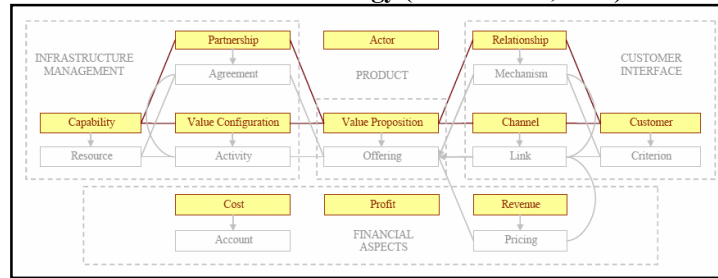
The main goal of the Osterwalder dissertation was to provide an Ontology that allows to accurately describe the business model of a firm. In the first instance, four main areas are identified that constitute the essential business model issues of a company: Product, Customer Interface, Infrastructure Management and Financial Aspects.

Next, these areas were broken down into a set of nine interrelated building blocks that allow for the conception of a business model. While the four areas are a rough categorization, the following nine elements are the core of Osterwalder’s Ontology business model:

Value Proposition, Target Customer, Distribution Channel, Relationship, Value Configuration, Capability, Partnership, Cost Structure and Revenue Model.

The Ontology Business Model is a set of elements and their relationships that aim at describing the money-earning logic/potential of a firm. As outlined above, Ontology contains nine business model building blocks, so-called business model elements. Every business model element can be divided into a set of defined sub-elements. This segmentation allows for the study of business models on different levels of granularity in more or less detail and according to specific needs. Every business model element can be described precisely, textually and graphically. In the graphical descriptions the elements and sub-elements are related to each other through a "setOf" and "isA" relationship (see following Figure 4).

**Figure 4**  
**Business Model Ontology (Osterwalder, 2004)**



Similarly Ontology will be applied to business strategies and business processes. When applying Ontology for business strategies, Balanced Score Cards (BSC) should be taken into account. BSC finds disjointed categories (customers, employees, internal processes, financial results) of strategies which an organisation should follow. Each of these categories may be further categorized according to common specific characteristics (e.g. business drivers) and so on. Each of these categories and subcategories has relationships and each subcategory or term can be structured further using specific attributes. Thus, Ontology could be an appropriate approach for determining business strategies.

Especially when using Ontology for business strategies, important terms such as trust building and legal issues, must be taken into account, which unfortunately are very often neglected and in doing so many business projects either failed or got past their completion deadline. Some useful approaches can be found in Kaplan and Norton, (1992) and SBS, (1996).

Finally business processes will be considered. Ontology is well established in this area. Horizontal and vertical business processes are two different processes. Horizontal processes are for instance procurement, delivering, maintaining, developing, and manufacturing. Vertical Business processes belong to domains, such as tourism, health care, chemistry, automotive. So as a rule, each of the mentioned horizontal business processes have a vertical specialization.

**RDF/OWL**

Meaning is expressed by RDF (RDF, 2006), which encodes it in sets of triples, each triple being rather like the subject, verb and object of an elementary sentence. In RDF, a document makes assertions that particular things (people, Web pages or whatever) have properties (such as "is a sister of," "is the author of") with certain values (another person, another Web page). This structure turns out to be a natural way to describe the vast majority of the data processed by machines.

OWL (OWL, 2006) is a Web Ontology language. Where earlier languages had been used to develop tools and Ontology for specific user communities (particularly in the sciences and in company-specific e-commerce applications), they were not defined to be compatible with the architecture of the World Wide Web in general, and the Semantic Web in particular.

OWL uses both URIs (URI, 1997) for naming and the description framework for the Web provided by RDF to add the following capabilities to Ontology: ability to be distributed across many systems, scalability to Web needs, compatibility with Web standards for accessibility and internationalization, openness and extensibility.

OWL builds on RDF and RDF Schema and adds more vocabulary to describe properties and categories: among others, relations between classes (e.g. disjointedness), cardinality (e.g. "exactly one"), equality, richer typing of properties, characteristics of properties (e.g. symmetry), and enumerated classes.

Both OWL (Ontology Web Language) and RDF (Resource Description Framework) have yet to prove their appropriateness within the collaborative network domain. RDF is the basis for expressing information about all things that can be addressed by a URI basis. In any case we are confronted with a lot of such things, which is in some sense not a reification of natural things. Often we consider only real world things (see (RMSIG, 2006), (Werthner, 2001)), but we have also to take into account domain specific processes (as for instance reservation, booking or canceling are not really reifications of a real world thing). This is evidence of proof that RDF is appropriate .

However, this must first be evaluated. Experiences described in RMSIG, (2006) and Werthner, (2001) would be very useful in this context. Although it seems that booking, reservation and canceling are very well understood and defined, the situation with value proposition for example, is less understood.

As mentioned before, RDF has only been applied to very similar/exact Ontology so far, in tourism for instance to make reservations, cancellations etc. The Business Model Ontology for tourism will be implemented by either basing it on the standardized RDF/OWL vocabulary, or by enhancing this vocabulary according to the requirements of the given Ontology.

### Collaboration Agents

We already introduced Agents in Withalm, 2000. Next, the most essential behaviors of Agents shall be briefly described. Agents will roam through the portals of participating organizations, looking for ideal partners. Agents will be programmed by a leading partner in a way that allows him to decide which partner will be the most suitable regarding Business Strategies, Business Models and Business Processes. To do so, Agents must look for Semantic Web portals that are characterized, that whose contents are presented in RDF/OWL. So, partners that are interested in co-operating in a breeding environment must implement their BS, BM, BP in RDF/OWL according to the established outcomes of ECOLEAD and using the proposed ICT-I of ECOLEAD. In applying this, ICT-I should contain RDF/OWL generators facilitating the preparation of this collaborative semantic WEB. On the other hand the required RDF/OWL generators for implementing the Agents are also contained in the ECOLEAD ICT-I. Agents must also be modified according to the concrete requirements of the respective domain (including BS, BM, and BP). These modifications could be done via attribute-based programming. Agents will then be in the position to roughly look for appropriate organisations.

In ENTER 2004 (Withalm, 2004) the crucial problems (see (FIPA, 2006)) of negotiation issues of agents were discussed. As already outlined, it seems feasible that the negotiation process of agents on the e-marketplace may be substituted by Semantic Web.

### Findings

The proposed approach will use actual projects. The project team will be involved in preparation endeavours, and in the first phase all results on how to build a breeding environment will be collated. In that phase many of the already developed guidelines, checklists and tools will be applied in the sense that especially all questions concerning the business strategies – above all trust buildings and legal issues – and business models will accelerate the decision process regarding which organisations should/could participate.

In particular, applying rules for trust building and business models (particularly those concerning pillar 2 ‘customer interface’, see Figure 3) will clarify that some organisations are direct competitors and it would not make sense to continue negotiations via collaboration agents between them. It will also become clearer, which organisations are most appropriate to join the network. Especially pillar 1 and pillar 3 (see Figure 3) - value proposition and infrastructure management - will be useful to select the right organisation.

Value proposition and infrastructure management indicate if organisations may prepare a common value proposition and infrastructure management in a virtual organisation. For instance, if infrastructure management does not agree, all efforts to automate these business processes are likely to fail.

Further questions to be answered:

- Are RDF/OWL ready for Sociological Ontology?
- Are SMTEs able to enhance their web portals with Collaboration and Tourism Ontology by applying RDF/OWL?
- Have Collaborative Agents the ability to select appropriate partners based to their business- oriented properties?
- Is the programming of Collaborative Agents feasible for service providers?
- Has Semantic Web the potential to substitute the crucial negotiation issues of Agents on e-marketplaces (FIPA, 2006)

### Conclusions

If the application of all these checklists, templates and tools improves and accelerates the negotiation process, and if all these concepts for finding appropriate partners for a breeding environment are implemented by means of Semantic Web (i.e. Ontology, RDF/OWL, Agents), they will become a very powerful tool.

However, pragmatically, it is thought that Semantic Web will proceed step by step. If organisations recognize the benefits of offering their business oriented properties to be able to join a Virtual Breeding Environment, then they will implement all these RDF/OWL codes and therefore will be reachable and understandable for Collaborative Agents, which are looking for and evaluating potential partners.

Finally we think in that way e-business projects will transcend to Collaborative Networks, which minimize the possibility of failing enormously.

Collaborative Agents could have a bright future in tourism insofar as:



1. First progresses are already accomplished with Ontology issues in tourism (i.e. in (RMSIG, 2006), HARMONISE (Werthner, 2001)).
2. ECOLEAD provides frameworks, reference models, guidelines ... for settling issues, how Collaborative Networks agree on common Business Strategies, Business Models, and Business Processes.
3. SMTEs are enabled to implement Tourism and Collaborative Ontology with the help of RDF/OWL enhancing their web sites and therefore are accessible to Collaborative Agents.
4. Collaborative Agents are implemented by service providers, who intend to create a Collaborative Network organizing mega events.
5. Negotiation vocabulary and behaviour of Collaborative Agents according to (FIPA, 2006) may not take into account SMTEs. It's up to the service providers to implement the Collaborative Agent. Therefore knowledge and responsibility of Agent implementation are transferred from the bulk of involved organizations, to the service providers.

**\*About the authors: Dr. Josef Withalm & Dipl.-Ing. Walter Wölfel are both with Siemens IT Solutions and Services PSE, Gudrunstraße 11, A-1101 Vienna, Austria. <http://www.pse.siemens.at>**

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## Developing Ecotourism in the Cameroon highlands

by *Tim Woods\**

The north-west highlands of Cameroon are a spectacular mountain region. With several trekking routes, diverse wildlife and friendly locals, the potential for ecotourism is huge. However, there is currently little tourism development in the region. Green Care, a local environmental group, has ambitious plans to change this.



Green Care's tree nursery in Shisong. Members collect seeds of native trees from the forest and nurture seedlings for their replanting programmes.

Green Care works in partnership with other environmental groups. BTCV International, a practical conservation charity based in the UK, has already started running holidays in Cameroon. Volunteers will help to plant native trees in the region to protect water catchments and get involved with other environmental activities. Working with these overseas visitors will help Green Care members to develop vital skills, such as catering for groups and planning trekking expeditions. I visited Green Care earlier this year on behalf of BTCV International. The partnership between the two organisations is continually developing, and in 2007 BTCV offered their first conservation holidays to Cameroon. Having previously conducted research into the impacts of ecotourism on communities in the Western Ghats in India, I was particularly interested in how Green Care planned to ensure that their environmental projects benefited local people and included them. At present, there is no suggestion that everyone will benefit directly from ecotourism; the projects will be small-scale, and given the lack of tourism in Cameroon it is likely that visitor numbers will

be low at first. However, ecotourism will help to support the community forest, a project which is of vital importance to the people, the wildlife and the environment in this fragile part of West Africa.

Green Care is based in Shisong village. Their key objectives are to protect and enhance the local environment. Activities include agricultural training for local farmers (for example keeping bees and wild pigs) and planting trees to protect water supplies. They also run environmental awareness campaigns, such as information about the risk of fire. They now hope to develop ecotourism to support environmental regeneration efforts and supplement livelihoods in the region.

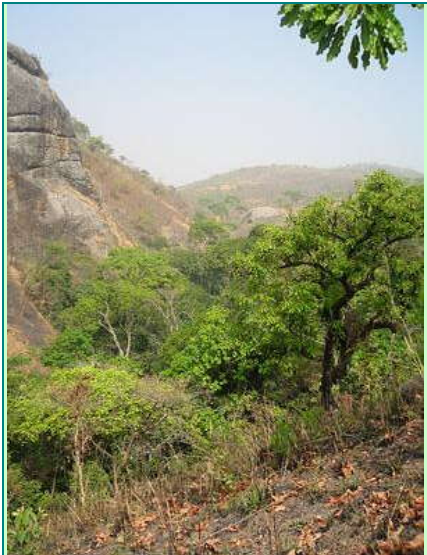
There is some tourism development in the region. The nearby town of Oku has several small scale ecotourism ventures, including forest walks and bird watching trips. However, there is frustration the lack of progress in developing the tourism industry in Cameroon, especially considering the array of cultural and national attractions in the country. This is mainly due to a lack of marketing skills and the limited infrastructure in the region.

Tourism in northwest Cameroon could bring much-needed additional income into this remote region, where agriculture provides a stable but limited income for most people. Possibilities include local people working as trekking guides or setting up accommodation, and tourists buying food and supplies from local businesses and markets. The region already receives visitors, due to a highly reputed hospital in Shisong, so there is a potential source of African tourists as well as overseas visitors.

### A community forest

In the past few years, Green Care have campaigned hard for a community forest in the region. This is an important feature of their long term ecotourism plan. There is a site about 20 kilometres from Shisong with several remaining fragments of montane forest which can be reconnected. Green Care have managed to obtain support for a community forest from all levels of the community, from villagers near the proposed site to the regional environmental departments. Most importantly, they also have approval from the local *fon*, the traditional chief of the region whose decision in such matters is final. The next steps are to establish a Forest Management Committee and identify the exact forest boundary. They will then map the site and prepare an inventory of plants and animal species, to use as a baseline for monitoring changes in biodiversity over time.

Community involvement in environmental projects is a key feature of Green Care's work. For example, a local residents' committee manage each of the catchment projects, which replant native trees around natural springs to protect village water supplies. The catchments are 'community owned' - each community contributes to management decisions and maintains the site after it has been planted.



A remaining fragment of montane forest. This will be reconnected to other fragments to restore forest cover

Community forest ownership and management now covers a quarter of natural forests in developing countries. Being owned and managed by the whole community means that everyone has a stake in protecting the forest and managing it in a sustainable manner. The situation in Shisong is different to many community forests, however. Most commonly, the legal ownership and management of a forest is passed from the state to local authorities and villagers. However, due to the extensive deforestation in the region, Green Care will have to undertake an extensive tree planting programme to reconnect several small patches of forest, rather than take control of an existing forest. Green Care aims to plant a variety of native tree species to reconnect these fragments and establish a large area of forest cover.

The site of the regenerated community forest will be the focus of ecotourism development. Montane forest in northwest Cameroon is a vital habitat for over 148 bird species, many endemic. The forest also provides medicinal plants, some of which face extinction. It is also home to several primate species and the forest has been suggested as a potential site for a gorilla relocation project, once it is fully restored. Green Care plans to build a series of trekking routes around the forest, for example from Shisong to the forest, and to nearby waterfalls and caves. Other possible ecotourism activities include horse riding and guided bird watching trips. Green Care has identified a site nearby for a sustainable tourist campsite just outside the forest.

There are also many traditional farmhouses in the region that will be used for overnight stays. There are other potential benefits from a community forest besides tourism and environmental benefits. It could provide income from planting valuable tree species, such as red mahogany, which could be sustainably harvested. Other potential income-generating activities include mushroom growing, planting *eru* (a creeper used for food) and beekeeping.

#### Is the Shisong region suitable for ecotourism?

There are several questions to be asked before trying to establish ecotourism in any region:

- Does the region have the attributes for successful ecotourism?
- Will this damage the environment?
- Will it bring environmental benefits?
- Will projects adhere to the fundamental principles of ecotourism, in terms of sustainability and environmental protection?

The highlands of northwest Cameroon are no unspoilt wilderness. The region is extensively farmed, although largely using low-impact methods. The many eucalyptus plantations mean that little native forest remains and there is also a major problem with forest fires. Despite this, the mountain scenery remains breathtaking, especially during the rainy season when the fields and hillsides are covered with lush vegetation. This makes it ideal for trekking. The few remaining pockets of forest are rich with wildlife, which means there is a strong environmental focus to treks. In keeping with the fundamental values of ecotourism, Green Care plan to include environmental education as a key aspect of their activities. Many of their members, who will lead the treks, are experts on local plants and animals. By keeping trekking groups small, the leaders will have several opportunities to talk about native species and how humans interact with the environment.

The remote villages and farming communities offer further cultural interest for visitors to the region. The region is certainly 'off the beaten track' with little in the way of large scale tourism development. Green Care are committed to continuing this and ensuring that all tourism projects are organised in a way that minimises negative impacts on the region's culture and environment. In this region, ecotourism is not so much about protecting the environment but supporting its restoration. Tourists can support many environmental activities in the region. For example, tourist interest in the development of the community forest will increase support and encouragement for this project, as well as funds to help pay for forest regeneration. For tourists, there is an opportunity to experience the process of an environment being restored. This is the most intriguing aspect of developing ecotourism in the region, and also an indication of one direction in which ecotourism may develop over time. Helping to restore degraded environments has the potential to generate greater benefits than visiting pristine or unspoilt environments, which are the focus of many ecotourism sites.

There is a distinct culture in the northwest highlands of Cameroon, which will supplement the environmental attractions the region has to offer in any new tourism industry. The region is famous for arts and crafts and there is a museum in nearby Kumbo run by a local artist, who made many of the exhibits. Visitors can also visit the *fon's* palace in Kumbo or nearby Oku. The role of the *fon* in Cameroonian culture is extremely important and dictates the activities of villages and tribes. Green Care members can explain the complex social structures and traditions of *fondom* to visiting groups.

**\*About the author: Tim Woods is Natural Resources Research Editor at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK, Web: [www.id21.org](http://www.id21.org) Email: [throughthemines \[at\] yahoo.co.uk](mailto:throughthemines[at]yahoo.co.uk)**

## Professional Education & Training in Hotels & Tourism Development in Bolivia

by Eberhard Rues\*

Professional education in any leading business is a must; and climbing the professional career ladder is a common goal: especially in the hotel industry, where the systematization learning process is important: Good “Education” ensures better job opportunities, better pay and progressive career building;

Traditionally, in Europe after the apprenticeship of three years, the second stage of career development continues: to gain diversified experiences –over many years- in different hotels and countries. In Latin America the larger upscale hotels –the majority have either franchise or management agreements with US hotel chains– adapt to the North American system, that offers executive training programs of 2 to 3 year to get hands on experience within different departments according to the company’s set goals and the trainee’s desired career objectives. In the case of international chain hotels, due credit should be given both for their commitment toward social responsibility and large investment in professional education. And most importantly these good examples serve as inspiration for local smaller lodgings and other businesses as well.

Professional education is paramount in the service industry such as the Hospitality and Tourism Industry worldwide. In Latin America’s less developed or smaller countries like Bolivia, Ecuador and El Salvador, between the 60’s and 90’s there were no professional –mid management level– hotel schools available. Therefore “International Up Scale Hotels” had to install their own training centres in order to survive. Three success stories include:

- The Radisson Plaza La Paz Hotel, La Paz: Turned also as Bolivia’s top hotel of professional trained staff of all departments;
- The Inter-Continental Hotel Quito, Ecuador, in 1970 (5): A comprehensive training program for both kitchen and service personnel was implemented permanently;
- The El Salvador Inter-Continental Hotel, San Salvador: In 1966, three Salvadoran apprentice cooks –of age 18- were sent to the Inter-Continental Hotel, Geneva, Switzerland, to go through a “Three year official Swiss Cook Apprenticeship.

The hotel industry is the backbone of tourism. In 1994 there was a shortage of a deluxe business convention Hotel in La Paz. Hence, the opening of the Radisson Plaza La Paz, was not only a natural choice but also a must. The timing and place were perfect.

Working Together within all of Bolivia’s regions and all sectors – private and public – and *promoting* events, forums and festivals were part of the systematization development process. A good example was the “First Tarija Wine and Gastronomic Festival” held in La Paz at Radisson Plaza Hotel, in February 1996. The following was achieved:

- *First*, to strengthen the “People’s Participation, Strategic Marketing and Destination Development.”
- *Second*, to increase the hotel’s regional promotions and events for the benefit of La Paz’s local and international communities; the hotel guests and tourists.
- *Third*, to collaborate with both Tarija wine makers and the tourism sector by means promoting Tarija’s finest wines and regional typical dishes.
- *Forth*, to recommend GTZ’s head office in La Paz, to send an expert to Tarija’s wine makers association to set up the system for an “International Quality Wine Control” that was done in the year in 1996.

Tourism based “Private, Public Partnerships” (PPP) struggle in Latin America. Whereas in Africa, Asia and Europe more PPP of sustainable tourism projects do exist. The main reason for this is that according to some international organizations criteria, the hospitality and tourism industry is considered a “deluxe industry.”

“A challenge for the 21<sup>st</sup> century” overcoming unilateral and self centered development. Unilateral and self centred development and marketing practices –exceptions make the rule- of Bolivia’s tourism attractions within the public and private sectors, have been common in the 90’s. The **shortsighted approach**, each sector worked on their own. Joint planning and development were not practiced.

In 2006, the number of environmental oriented lodges/cabanahotels in Bolivia increased threefold in comparison to 1994.

The Bolivian tourism industry has followed the systematic development process; the first signs of **upward trends** of International tourist arrivals (1000) are seen as following:

- In 1990, 254; 1995, 284; 2000, 319; 2002, 334; 2003, 370; and 2004, 405. (Source: World Tourism Organization, 2005 edition)
- Bolivia’s tourism has gone long way, but it still has a very long way to go, in order to confront the strong global tourism competition: “A challenge for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”



*Education* for communities -in any remote or natural region in Bolivia and around the world- is paramount and is the key to both *sustainability* and *poverty reduction*: By means of taking part in a cooperative community project; or owning a small eco-farm; or eco-agro tourism business; or eco-lodge, among others. *Good "Education" ensures better job opportunities, better pay and progressive career building*:

- The installment of "*Environmental Learning and Investigation Centers*" (ELIC) coupled with educational programs toward: renewable energy, environmental farming, eco-mining and forest management" among others; that are linked with "community owned or managed eco- lodges or eco-agro tourism." According to each region infrastructure, environment, demand and supply. As well the authorization and operating permission of the government and local communities;
- A project proposal of the ELIC (Spanish version) written by Rues in 2003 –is available for implementation- based on practical experiences and involvement – since 1976 - within the sustainable tourism systematic development process in four Latin American countries, Ecuador, Bolivia, Venezuela and Mexico.

**2) Partnering with International Organizations, NGO's, Hotels and Tour Operators** The best advise for integrated responsible sustainable tourism development in Bolivia for the future are both *cooperation* and *partnerships* within the private and public sectors. A strategy that has proven relative success in Bolivia in the "Stage One Development - 1994 –1996:" As outlined through the experiences and practices in this document, with the key players; National Chamber of Commerce, SENATUR, ETAB, La Paz Hotel, *Universidad Catolica Boliviana*, CAF, Tour Operators, RHS EcoFriendly Hotels, RHMC, Media, and new partners:

- Since the 50's International hotel chains, hoteliers, organizations actively got involved toward integrated tourism pursuing a systematic development process around the world. But in most cases – in developing countries - they have **targeted the higher markets**;
- Causing a *greater gap* between the "upper class of eco-lodgings" and the "lower and mid class eco-lodgings" every year. **This development is wrong in the eye of environmental responsible hoteliers.** For it does not help to reduce poverty. On the other hand, "*the mid income eco-tourists do not have the opportunity to visit remote nature areas*";
- In the emerging eco-tourism destinations, more deluxe eco-resorts/hotels than lower-mid priced eco-lodges have been built and developed since the mid 90's. The **upscale eco-resorts/hotels trend development is growing faster** in comparison to the *lower priced eco-lodges* since 2006.

For the above reasons *timing* again is right to support and take part in the continuing systematization development process; in the same way as the key players did, by Working Together and to diligently collaborate to place Bolivia within "The Race of International EcoTourism Development" on the world market. The basic structure for "Partnering with International Organizations, NGO's and Hotels" could be as following:

1. **Horizontal participation, cooperation and development** with the same key players and new ones, for examples, RIDELC, CEBEM, REDESMA, FAN, GTZ, UNEP, UNESCO, US-AID, CAF, World Bank, nature scientists, all national parks among others, represented per region; La Paz and the Altiplano; Santa Cruz and the Lowlands; Sucre, Cochabamba and Central Valleys and the Amazon;
2. The **community based ecotourism facilities**; indigenous family homes, lodges, guesthouses, camps are to be grouped in two areas:
  - a) Remote natural area, near and/or in national parks and reserves; and
  - b) Rural and agricultural areas close to historic villages and smaller cities;
3. The ecotourism facilities, according the existing or to be build infrastructure shall have either a small "**Environmental Learning and Investigation Center**" (ELIC) or could function as an arm of the partner university(s) or extension courses of continuing education programmes, or field studies as suggested earlier. The ELIC should be coordinated and supported by the partner university(s) NGOs, and other stakeholders in the projects;
4. The commitment: each of the partners shall become an **active player** in the systematization progress of responsible tourism development;
5. The *benefits* of the ELIC for the "community based ecotourism facilities are numerous, a few examples as following;
  - Providing **education to the marginalized communities**;
  - By promoting tourism –*sustainable and study tourism- poverty* will reduce;
  - Providing on site extension courses and field studies of all environment related topics –for 10 to 30 persons- for both students, faculty, professionals in the field; nature science, renewable energy, hotel and tourism professionals and eco-tourists. And naturally for all communities who live in the nearby area, in addition with related topics; health care, sanitation, HIV, and others.

The above mentioned project recommendation of the "Bolivian Initiative for Integrated Sustainable Tourism Development" (BIISTD) of Private, Public Partnerships" (PPP) could be developed in other countries around the globe. The BIISTD would serve as the "model project" that shall be launched first in this country. Hence, Bolivia would take the role as *leading principal* partner, with the head office in Bolivia.

**3) Environmental law enforcement and policies for the hospitality industry**

Law enforcement should be on the top priority list as well because: The biggest problem in Bolivia and most countries in Latin America in the 90's and in 2006 was and is the lack of environmental law enforcement and policies for the hospitality industry. On the contrary, the preservation laws at national parks and reserves in Bolivia that are administered by the *Servicio Nacional*

*de Areas Protegidas* (SERNAP) meet the international environment standards - in most cases - according REDESMA's bulletin on the Internet.

A good example can be taken from the **Nuremberg Declaration, Germany in 1991**: That not only shows the "significant role of both setting standards and the promotion of environmental good practices of relevant government agencies," but also the support of **strict law enforcement** and the cooperation of the Hotel and Restaurant Industry are necessary, for the benefit of the industry at large.

Most European countries have implemented environmental policies – that follow the principle of the "Nuremberg Declaration" for the hotel and tourism industry in 1992. Other countries followed similar green policies as well. For example in the Americas: Costa Rica launched the "Certification for Sustainable Tourism" in 1997; and in Florida the "Green Lodging Programme" in 2003.

*\*About the author: Eberhardt H.Rues, Founder and President of RUES Hotel Management and Consulting (RHMC) and RUES Hotel Selection (RHS) EcoFriendly Hotels Worldwide. Rues has been involved in diverse Sustainable Tourism Development projects and Education programmes since 1976 in Latin America, Europe, United States of America, Africa, China and India.*

## ECOCLUB MONITOR

A new cold war frontline between 'globalisation' and 'anti-globalisation' forces, also affects Tourism, tourists, communities and tourism businesses around the world. Two developments currently monitored by ECOCLUB are the following:

### Digging each other's (golf) hole

*Cavo Sidero, Crete, Greece*



*Now you see it, now you golf...*

which ruled Crete until the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At that time, the Ottoman Authorities donated all of the land of the peninsula to the powerful Greek orthodox Monastery of Toplou. After protracted disputes with the greek state, the Monastery managed to keep most of the land apart from a section considered a state forest, and set up a foundation to manage it, so that it could also avoid a new law that would nationalise 30% of Monastery land. In 1995, two years after the death of the first president of the foundation in a car accident, the foundation decided to offer a long-80 year lease to a previously unknown UK investors group to develop the peninsula (26 square km – 4 times the size of Gibraltar) as a huge golfing, resort, vila & marina complex, (7,000 rooms, 5 "villages"/small towns, 3 golf courts covering 80 hectares in total) in return for 10% of the gross annual revenues. The total investment is estimated at Euros 1.2 billion. The investors only received official approval of the environmental impact study in February 2007, after 11 years of trying. After 2004, the project was seen favourably by the new conservative, pro-business and pro-golf government (the vice-minister of finance also heading the greek golf association).

The local community of Siteia prefecture, in eastern Crete, is rather sceptical over the planned mega-development of a golf resort in a more or less pristine cape, a fifth of which is recognised by the European Union as a protected area (Natura 2000), called Cavo Sidero (Cape Iron). The area borders Europe's only indigenous Palm forest, Vai, a hippy favourite in the 1970s.

The two sides are led by local environmentalists and the left on the one side, and the Church and the right wing, on the other, with a high court battle scheduled for the end of 2007.

The story goes all the way back to the Ottoman Empire,



Magic Image: The developers could argue grass grows naturally and that the golf court would be as invisible. Locals allege that the monastery encourages herdsmen to grow grass for the sheep, as a precursor. In addition, the area is an archeological site, part of the ancient mines of Itanos – witness the broken ancient columns.

with very high connections. There was muted opposition from other circles, as the peninsula is of military & defence significance, not very far from the spot where a Greek and Turkish fighter plane collided and crashed after a mock dogfight in 2006.

Supporters argue that only 1% of the area or 255,000 sq. metres will be built, and that the accommodation capacity was reduced from the original 12,000 beds to 7,000, while an expensive desalination plant will cover the needs of the golf courses (but not of the hotels and villas, which will take water from the municipality, reply opponents). The environmental impact study (perhaps intentionally) involved prestigious local scientists with credibility in left & ecological circles. Supporters pledge that all environmental laws and obligations to the local community will be met, and that the development will actually spare the area from unplanned development, while generating many “local” jobs, up to 4,000. The developers have also hired a well-connected and respected UK NGO / green consultancy, to oversee the environmental sustainability of the project. It is strange however that they did not seek or prefer to partner with a local NGO. If all goes according to plan, the resort will be operational in late 2009, although building works are expected to continue for up to 10 more years. The project’s funds appear to be sourced from private investors, bank loans, and (state or EU) subsidies. Agreements with Kempinsky Hotels, that will manage a five star luxury hotel within the complex, and PGA Golf Management increase the projects credibility. In an article in the Sunday Telegraph in June 2005, the president of the developers is quoted as enjoying the enthusiastic backup of the Greek government. The developers company, renamed Minoan Group PLC, possibly to acquire a more Cretan aura, since the spring of 2007 is being traded on AIM, the sub-market of the London Stock Exchange for smaller, riskier companies. The resort aims to be a year round holiday complex, in addition to the 45 golf holes, it will also offer horse riding, athletics, water sports, conference centre, a theatre and arts complex, organic agriculture and an educational botanical garden.

The most-ecofriendly resort is of course the one that will never be built, but only as long as nothing else will take its place, as development, like nature, does not like vacuums. Beyond mega-resorts, development of mini resorts, and villa developments can have equally devastating effects, and Crete is now experiencing rapid holiday home construction aiming at the North European (mainly UK & German) retirement market. On a densely populated island, there is greater competition between and within various land uses and conservation, so adjustments and hard compromises need sometimes to be made to lofty principles & expectations, but certainly not without standing one’s ground first. The local “community” should ideally have the last word, although it is rarely united, especially in emancipated, genuinely democratic countries with individualist traditions, while there is always the chance of a community getting it totally wrong, by listening to the Sirens of get-rich-quick.

Works have not yet started, and the saga will be continued at Greece’s Supreme Court on November 2, 2007 after local environmentalists pleaded in April 2007 to stop the project. The unprecedented summer forest fires of 2007 in the mean time, have angered many otherwise passive citizens, and there is a new wave of environmentalist concern.

The twist in the story is that the Toplou Monastery as all Cretan churches reports directly to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople (based in Istanbul, Turkey), Vartholomeos I, spiritual leader of some 300 m. Christian Orthodox around the world, who is also known as the Green Patriarch, for his clear views in favour of environmental conservation.

#### Further Reading:

[http://www.plori.gr/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=250](http://www.plori.gr/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=250) (in Greek)

<http://www.iospress.gr/ios2007/ios20070715.htm> (in Greek)

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/money/main.jhtml?xml=/money/2005/06/19/cnofex19.xml&sSheet=/money/2005/06/19/ixcity.html>

<http://www.minoangroup.com> (Official site, in English)



## A feast for unity divides

*Oaxaca, Oaxaca, Mexico*



Until May 2006, Oaxaca was known to the world as a quaint colonial town, one of the first established by the Spanish in the Americas, and a living monument enjoying Unesco World Heritage status. It was thus receiving many independent travellers who wanted to sample the real Mexico, a world away from the picture perfect beaches of Cancun and the dated resort of Acapulco.

In May 2006, a prolonged teachers strike and occupation of the Zocalo – the main square and tourist attraction – was met by violence by the local government and vigilante elements, and after constant and increasing upheaval was eventually put down at the end of October 2006 by 10,000 federal police and troops, and strikers leaders arrested. Over this period, the deaths among teachers, including that of an American Indymedia journalist Bradley Will, shot by vigilantes, shocked the world, scared the tourists, and forever changed the quaint image of Oaxaca.

In July 2006, the demonstrators has been successful in cancelling the annual Guelaguetza festival, which is important to the local tourism sector, and set fire to the amphitheatre, while they celebrated their own Guelaguetza ‘popular at Oaxaca’s University. This year, the authorities were absolutely intent on avoiding this, and when 30,000 demonstrators tried to interrupt the official celebration by organising an alternative ‘people’s Guelaguetza’ and march towards the hillside amphitheatre where the official Guelaguetz was held with 15,000 spectators, the police cracked down heavily, with one death and many injured.

Guelaguetza, a word with Zapotec language, is a popular gift-giving festival (now gift-throwing to the audience) with pre-colonial roots, launched in 1932 in Oaxaca, a year after a disastrous earthquake, as a humanitarian effort, and a celebration of local culture, bringing together dancers and folk artists from the 16 ethnic groups of the state. Guelaguetza is celebrated each year, on the two Mondays following July 16, St. Carmen’s day July 16. This year Guelaguetza was celebrated on July 23 and July 30, but demonstrators accused the local governor of turning the festival into a propagandistic farce, with police disguised as spectators, while critics on the left view the event within the “typical hypocrisy of creole racism”, as a banquet of power, a 400 peso event sponsored by Coca-Cola and administered through Ticket Master. "Mini-Guelaguetzas" are conducted at several hotels throughout the year but obviously they are even less authentic.

Local tourism businesses are among the victims of the conflict with occupancy rates below 40%. According to Oaxaca-based travel journalist and [Planeta.com](http://www.planeta.com) Editor Ron Mader “Numerous businesses have closed. While others have taken out loans that they need to repay in the near future, while tourism newspapers such as Go Oaxaca and the Oaxaca tourism map have not had new editions for more than six months, with not enough local advertising to resume publication” He adds that “Things in Oaxaca are still very tough. Tourism is down 80% and even the school where we hold the Rural Tourism Fair is moving because of the lack of students.” The Annual Rural Tourism Fair is a shining example of what Tourism can do, if it is from the people and for the people. To assist local artisans cope with diminished sales, Mader has taught many of them how to use the Web to sell their work. According to Mader, ecotourism and responsible travel contribute to democracy when travellers seek out operations that benefit locals. He sees Guelaguetza as connecting indigenous traditions with the Catholic faith and explains that at its base is an exchange of products and services, an age-old tradition of ‘paying it forward.’ Asked whether it is safe for tourists to visit the city, he replies that most Oaxacans say ‘yes’ it’s time to promote travel and the sooner the better. Things remain ‘unresolved’ but that alone should not deter visitors.

Trying to encourage tourists to return to the city, Andres Bello Guerra, president of the Oaxaca hotel association was recently quoted by the [Los Angeles Times](http://www.losangelestimes.com) as saying. "The city of Oaxaca is very tranquil, there are no problems. You can come here with your family." Meanwhile international attention will not go away. On July 31, Amnesty International urged the Mexican government on Tuesday to investigate possible torture and abductions by state officials during months of protests against the governor in the city of Oaxaca in 2006. Currently Amnesty’s International Secretary General Irene Khan is [visiting Oaxaca](http://www.amnesty.org), while protests about human rights abuses in Oaxaca were held outside Mexican consulates in some US cities in July.

Underdevelopment may be quaint but can never be a solid basis for Ecotourism in the long run. Ecotourism requires human development, individual liberty, social justice and a genuine, functioning democracy. Whether and how it can play - or be allowed to play - any role in bringing about the above remains to be seen.

### Further Reading:

<http://www.planeta.com/ecotravel/mexico/oaxaca/guelaguetzafestival.html>

<http://www.narconews.com/Issue46/article2745.html>

<http://aoaxaca.com/guelaguetza/> (Official Site)



**AROUND THE ECO WORLD****Africa**

**Kenya: Ecotourism Kenya** has registered its objection to new tourist lodges in Samburu and Buffalo Springs National Reserves on the basis that they will contribute to loss of biodiversity in the fragile Reserves. The Association pointed out that the Samburu National Reserve has a General Management Plan that already acknowledges that the reserve has exceeded its development capacity in terms of lodges. Ecotourism Kenya has also advised its Members to "consult widely" when selecting sites for lodges and camps.

**South Africa: Wildebeest Ecolodge** reports that a new community project called "The Odakaneni Community Ark" undertaken by them is now fully operational. Through guest donations Wildebeests were able to start a feeding scheme for children affected by poverty and HIV/AIDS. Some of the children are orphans due to HIV/AIDS. On a monthly base, on the last Saturday of the month, they provide a warm meal, fruits, clothes and toys for approx. 120 children who are living in the Odakaneni community. On the gathering days the children will learn some basic English, Life orientation and basic HIV/AIDS counselling. New donations towards the project made it possible to organise the feeding scheme twice every month, from the summer of 2007.

Related: <http://www.wildebeestecolodge.com>

**Americas**

**Canada:** At a **UNWTO Executive Council** meeting held in Hammamet, Tunisia, council members gave the World Centre of Excellence for Destinations (CED), an NGO founded in February 2007 and headquartered in Montreal, the mandate to develop an international system to measure the 'excellence' of tourist destinations, including development of new forms of tourism and changing trends in sustainable tourism. CED Founding partners include Tourisme Montréal University of Quebec at Montreal (UQAM), Bell Canada, National Geographic's Centre for Sustainable Destinations and George Washington University. CED is led by Dr. François Bédard, Professor in the Department of Tourism and Urban Studies at the Ecole des Sciences de la Gestion, a business school of the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM).

**Canada: Kalahari Management** announces wildlife tourism survey results. A recent survey conducted by Kalahari Management investigated whether wildlife tourists are using guiding services? The initial hypothesis was that this would be a sure thing given the enhanced experience that guides can provide, but the survey showed that guides were the least important factor in selecting a destination for wildlife watchers. For more details about the travel habits of nature lovers, please read the latest issue of EcoTourism Management at <http://www.kalahari-online.com/sum07.pdf>

**Costa Rica: Costa Rican President admits child sex tourism destination status.** At a July 18, 2007 press conference, President Oscar Arias bravely admitted: "We are an international destination for child sex tourism, and we are also a transit zone for the trade of young people for sexual exploitation. Denial won't get us anywhere." Arias blamed poverty, inequality, lack of opportunity, as well as school dropout as roots of the problem, rather than demand from tourists. A new law unveiled at the press conference will increase protection for victims of sexual exploitation ages 13 and under.

**Dominica:** The beginning of 2007 has been a mega busy time at **3 Rivers Eco Lodge**. February and March saw the implementation of Computer Mission Dominica. Co-ordinated by 3 Rivers Eco Lodge, Lifeline Ministries, and their collaborative registered NGO, The Sustainable Living Initiative (SLIC), the project saw the arrival of 200 computers, donated by The Bromsgrove School in the UK, to the port in Dominica. NS Optimum, a computer firm in the UK, arranged for each of the computers to be individually refurbished to meet standards sought by the Ministry of Education here on the island. NS Optimum then sent two cablers and technicians who spent two weeks on the island, each day in a different school, running an installation training workshop to install the computers, servers, switches, and other bits, with the students and teachers of each individual school. The project was a massive success, culminating in a live video conference at one of the recipient schools, using the new equipment to have a press conference talking to the headmaster of the Bromsgrove School in the UK, and various dignitaries and students here in Dominica. At the same time 3 Rivers has gone through some upgrades and changes in the last few months. The restaurant has been expanded, the menu is now delicious and extensive, and extra facilities have been built attached to the restaurant. Simultaneously the latest tree house, Chataniere Lodge is almost complete, and should be ready to rent by the end of the summer. To support 3 Rivers various community projects, the proprietor Jem Winston now also offers eco tourism guest speaker and consultancy services. Related: <http://www.3riversdominica.com> / <http://www.jemwinston.com>

**Ecuador: Powerful Tourism & Conservation Alliance to focus on Ecuador.** Fifteen U.S. conservation & tourism development organizations and businesses have set up a 'Global Sustainable Tourism Alliance' under the aegis of the United States Agency for International Development. The new alliance is managed by the AED Center for Environmental Strategies, with The George Washington University, Solimar International and The Nature Conservancy as managing partners. Alliance Members also include Conservation International, Citizens Development Corps, Counterpart International, EplerWood International, Nathan Associates, National Geographic Society, Rainforest Alliance, RARE, University of Hawaii School of Travel Industry Management, UNESCO World Heritage Centre, and the USDA Forest Service - Heritage Design. The Alliance's first initiative will be in Ecuador with the cooperation of the country's Tourism & Environment Ministries. Ecuador's relations with the U.S. have gradually deteriorated since the election of Rafael Correa as President, seen by the US as an ally of

Venezuela's Chavez, while UNESCO has just added the Galapagos Islands, which was the world's first officially designated World Heritage site, to its "List of World Heritage in Danger".

**United States: Hawaii:** Ms **JoLoyce Kaia**, Proprietor of **Hana Maui & Volcano Heart** (Web: <http://ecoclub.com/hanamaui>) sented the island of Maui at the annual Association Meeting of the 16 Conservation Districts of Hawaii. There are four Individual Soil and Water Conservation Districts in Maui, and all directors and associated on their boards are volunteers. They conduct soil and water conservation activities within their respective boundaries. The districts have been able to accomplish much on a meagre budget although the financial situation has gotten critical, as the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service is now prioritising on Farm Bill Programs. Nevertheless the Island of Maui was able to hire a Conservation Specialist to meet increased needs, and oversee programs, including conservation education and contests, trail building, career days, watershed restoration, organic agriculture and invasive species control. In recent years Maui is experiencing rapid population and tourism growth and this puts extra pressures on soil and water.

## Asia & Pacific

**Australia: Whale-shark black-market threatens Ningaloo reef ecotourism.** Australian Institute of Marine Sciences (AIMS) and Charles Darwin University researchers studying 12 years of photographs from Western Australia's Ningaloo Reef in an attempt to predict whale-shark population size have discovered a steady decline, particularly in the bigger sharks. Although countries such as India, the Philippines, Maldives and Taiwan have banned whale shark fishing, a black market for the shark's meat is thriving. The report's co-author, Dr Mark Meekan, called on the Australian Government to work with its northern neighbours to promote ecotourism and help stem the predation of the endangered species. In Western Australia, whale shark tourism brings in over AUD 6 m. each year.

**Bahrain: New arab sustainable tourism society to encourage women to enter tourism.** A new 'Sustainable Tourism Society of Bahrain' aims to encourage more women to take up tourism jobs and promote responsible tourism among visitors and residents. Founder Abdulla Abdulaziz, a Labour Ministry official, told Gulf Daily News: "I do not want tourism if our identity is going to vanish". The new society appears to have the support of Gulf Air.

**China: Beijing hotels told to go easy on the aircon.** With one year left for the Olympics, and in an effort to curb energy consumption, Beijing vice-mayor has ordered city hotels to adjust their airconditioning units so that temperature varies only within specific bounds: from 20 degrees Celsius in winter to 26 C in the summer. The order is not voluntary with police expected to engage in spot checks. Hotels use up around 20% of electricity consumption in Beijing. In addition, all hotels with Olympic Games contracts were urged to meet national green hotel standards before the end of 2007, installing water-saving equipment, power-saving light bulbs and linen wash-saving programs. By the end of 2006, only 192 hotels out of 700 starred hotels and a few unstarred ones, had been officially approved as "eco-friendly" according to the national standard for green hotels. The standard was drafted and put in effect in June 2002 by The China Hotels Association and has five grades, the lowest being A and the highest AAAAA.

**Oman: Unesco deletes world heritage site for failing to conserve wildlife.** For the first time in its history, UNESCO deleted a property, the Arabian Oryx Sanctuary in Oman, from the list of World Heritage sites, due to the local government's decision to hand over part of the area to an oil company for exploration and downsizing the area by 90% from 28,000 square kilometres to 2,824 square kilometres. The number of the Arabian Oryx, a white antelope (*Oryx leucoryx*), had already come down from 450 to 65 in the last ten years due to poaching. The Arabian Oryx had become extinct in the wild in 1972, but was reintroduced in January 1982 in the desert of Oman, in what came to symbolise a 'new approach' to species conservation. However in early 1996 poaching resumed and by September 1998 had reduced the wild population to just 138 animals of which just 28 were females - no longer a viable wild population. Meanwhile, UNESCO removed four sites from the List of World Heritage in Danger, recognizing improvements in their conservation: Everglades National Park (USA), Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve (Honduras), Royal Palaces of Abomey (Benin) and Kathmandu Valley (Nepal), and inscribed three new endangered sites: Galapagos (Ecuador), Niokolo-Koba National Park (Senegal) and Samarra (Iraq).

### **India: New village tourism scheme launched in Kerala, India**

Kerala's Chief Minister, Mr V.S. Achuthanandan, launched a new Kerala Tourism Authority's village tourism development scheme called 'My Village, A Tourism Friendly Village', aiming to decentralise tourism development in the State, with the creation of 140 'tourism-friendly villages'. These villages are planned to be self-sufficient by sourcing their daily food requirements locally. Mr Achuthanandan also urged villagers to protect their natural environment, which was the main attraction for foreign tourists in his view. Famous for its backwater houseboat cruises and the Periyar Tiger Sanctuary, Kerala has one of the highest literacy rates in India.

**Laos:** The **Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre** has opened its doors in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR. A private museum, the Centre features exhibits of ethnic artefacts, a museum shop, and the Patio Café. The Official Opening was held on 5 July, attended by Kongchanh Khammavong, Chairman of the Lao National Front for Construction, Luang Prabang Province, William Booth, Managing Director of Jim Thompson Thai Silk Company, and over 100 business people, government officials, and tour companies. The Centre exhibits ethnic clothing, household objects, religious artefacts, and handicrafts, with information in English and Lao languages. The Museum Shop sells books, photos and exclusive handicrafts directly from ethnic communities. The Patio Cafe, run by L'Elephant Restaurant, serves food and drinks with a view of That Chomsi. Guided tours and seminars are available on request. Thongkhoun Southvilay, Co-Director of TAEC explains, "Our objective is to help locals and visitors learn about the different ethnic groups of northern Laos. We also want to provide a new and interesting learning experience." Funds from entry fees, donations, and services go to the running of the Centre and developing activities that promote cultural diversity and preservation. The Centre is the brainchild of ECOCLUB Member **Tara Gujadhur** and Thongkhoun Souththivilay, the founders and co-directors. Tara Gujadhur is an American who worked as an advisor to the Luang Prabang Tourism Office for 3 years before starting this project. Thongkhoun Souththivilay has been working at the Luang Prabang National Museum for over 6 years, and is currently the Collection Manager. Together they began work on TAEC over one year ago, finding and renovating a heritage building, researching and working with ethnic communities, and building a collection. They hope that the Centre will be a resource for anyone wanting to appreciate and preserve the cultural diversity of Laos. For more information <http://www.taeclaos.org>



**Philippines: Controversial health spa project in active volcano crater,** Controversy surrounds a proposed health spa project by Korean company Jung Ang Interventure Corporation in the Philippines. The resort would be built along the crater of Taal, an active volcano on the island of Luzon in the Philippines. Apparently the developers had the backing of the regional government, however a Department of Tourism (DOT) spokesperson denied that the Korean project was ever endorsed as the Volcano area is considered a permanent danger zone. The regional office of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources' will now review the environment compliance certificate (ECC) already obtained by the developers.

## Europe

**Belarus:** In June, **Professor Todd Comen** of the Institute For Integrated Rural Tourism of Vermont, USA (Web: [www.integratedtourism.com](http://www.integratedtourism.com)) travelled to Belarus under the sponsorship of the U.S. Embassy Guest Speakers Program to speak on the topic of integrated rural tourism. In Belarus, enthusiasm for rural and ecotourism has gripped eager entrepreneurs. Led by Valeria Klitsunova, executive director of the Belarus Rural and Eco Tourism Association, one eager group in the north has made strides in developing an integrated rural tourism product that is based on the European Greenways model. In Minsk, the Professor made a presentation at the U.S. Embassy for tourism providers and news journalists interested in rural and eco tourism. Following the program in Minsk, Professor Comen traveled to the Rossony region to attend a lively community festival and present a day-long workshop to guest house owners and others interested in learning to develop a rural tourism product. The workshop content focused on product development, guest service, and guest house design. Three chapters of Professor Comen's book on integrated rural tourism were translated into Russian (funded by the Eurasia Fund) and provided to the participants. Belarus is a welcome change for travellers seeking authenticity.



**France: Les Cygnes** is delighted to announce their contribution to sustaining the environment, as the first ever Gite Complex in France to allow visitors to reduce their carbon footprint by planting trees within the property. Les Cygnes is a luxurious complex of 3 self-catering Gites in the Poitou-Charentes region of France, with more than 5 acres of land. A portion of this land is to be used for the planting of indigenous trees to help negate the carbon emissions involved in travel to and from Les Cygnes. Visitors will be encouraged to purchase trees, which can be planted on-site, or asked to contribute to charities involved in Carbon Footprint offsetting. Les Cygnes is fully committed to helping protect the environment. Graeme Swan, the proprietor explained "We want guests to enjoy themselves whilst helping to secure the planet's future."

Related: <http://www.lescygnes.net/erase-your-carbon-footprint.htm>

**Greece: NGOs protest over new national tourism land-zoning plan.** Five of Greece's biggest environmental NGOs staged a joint press conference to declare their opposition to the Environment Ministry's new Tourism 'land-zoning' plan. The NGOs called the new law both 'anti-touristic' & anti-environmental on the grounds that it gives the green light to holiday-home developments (aimed at northern Europeans) around the country, even within protected areas and even in uninhabited islands with important prehistoric sites such as Keros island. The NGOs were also angry at the government's zeal on developing golf

courses in 15 prefectures. A related petition was also presented to the Ministry, signed by 40 university professors and 200 European environmental protection groups.

**Greece - Chios:** The “**Regional Network for Ecotourism Initiatives - Ecoaction**” an NGO, is taking part in the **3rd Agrotourism Festival** in Chios island from 3 to 10 August. The festival is held in the municipal garden of Chios town and is now established as a festival of quality promoting the flavours and the culture of the island. Last year the festival surpassed all expectations with 15,000 visitors and twice the number of exhibitors (65) than last year. Exhibitors included local farmers, artisans and craftsmen, painters, wax, ceramic & jewellery makers, photographers, book-publishers as well as municipalities, cultural & athletic groups. Ecoaction took part for the first time in 2006 with a stand and made a presentation on “regional ecotourism development programs in Greece”. For more information contact Mr Kostas Makras at: k\_makras [at] hotmail.com

**Slovakia: PanParks**, an NGO network of European Parks, fears that certain political developments in Slovakia will reverse a former decision to have the Tatra National Park gaining a PAN Park certification. The NGO hints at a new anti-environmental government direction which has seen the withdrawal of all directors of slovakian protected areas including the director of the Tatra N.P., the reduction of N.P. personnel, the reevaluation of the size of Natura 2000 sites, and increased logging in Ticha and Koprova valleys.

**United Kingdom: Visit Wales**, the tourism team of the Welsh Assembly government, has shown its commitment to accessible & ecological tourism with a grant of more than £7,000 to enable Machynlleth-based **Eco Retreats** (Web: <http://www.ecoretreats.co.uk> ) to improve facilities for people with disabilities. Eco Retreats, which is run by Michael and Chanan Bonser and offers tipi-based breaks in the heart of the Dyfi Forest, currently has four tipis, each set in its own private, stunning location. Each tipi is furnished with a log fire, sheepskin rugs, romantic fabrics and a double bed. Michael Bonser says: “With the high profile of global warming and our carbon footprint, it is becoming increasingly important to consider our choices of holiday. Ecotourism is one answer as such ecological and ethical holidays have a minimal impact upon the environment. The tipi experience helps our guests reconnect with the rhythms of the environment, experience the benefits of holistic therapy and gain a sound understanding of eco-related issues through an organized visit to the nearby Centre for Alternative Technology, Europe's foremost Eco Centre. The company will soon introduce new accommodation in the form of yurts, circular tents on wooden frames traditionally used in the Asian steppes, along with a central meeting space for the local community or visiting groups.

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