

# Conceptualising sustainable tourism: Ethics, inequalities and colonialism.

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## Abstract

*This paper focuses broadly on ethical consumption and more specifically on an emerging consumption practice within the tourism industry, sustainable tourism. The paper engages with ethical consumption and sustainable tourism in order to establish if we could conceptualise sustainable tourism as an emerging form of ethical consumption: consuming places, spaces, environment and culture, within the context of a globalising world. Tourism is now considered the fastest growing industry in the world; international travel is becoming common place for an increasing number of individuals, although inequalities clearly exist in access and distribution. This paper will examine the historical trajectories, aims and objectives of both ethical consumption and sustainable tourism in order to unpack commonalities and inconsistencies between the two. Finally the paper shall offer a post-colonial critique of sustainable tourism in relation to two central concepts within sustainable tourism – ecological sustainability and human rights. Overall, this paper serves to encourage discussion surrounding sustainable tourism and ethical consumption and argues that there is a need to approach both with a critical eye and an element of caution if we are to progress in the challenge of tackling global inequalities.*

**Keywords** Ethics, Consumption, Sustainable Tourism, Colonialism

## Introduction

This paper will attempt to respond to an emerging area of growth within globalization debates which has as yet been subject to little academic attention – good ethical responses to the ‘bads’ of globalization. Globalization (Giddens, 2002) is a term used to refer to the way in which our lives increasingly rely on patterns of communication, interaction and exchange that transcend the times, spaces and places of local life from the home to the nation, incorporating technological, political, social, psychological, economic, ecological and cultural aspects of modern day life. The nature, extent and benefits of globalization are still being fiercely contested in many academic fields and political movements. For example, it can be argued that what we

now label as 'globalization' is in fact '...the continuation of base structures of capitalism or the power of nation-states' (Adams, 2007, p.2). However, on a global scale, it is argued that cheaper goods have led to improved standards of living for sections of the Global North population (Murray and Reynolds, 2007). In addition, there is also an increased recognition that mass production and an international division of labour unfairly exploits some individuals and environments, particularly in 'Third World' countries (Chichilnisky, 1994). Such knowledge underpins movements with an explicitly ethical agenda, whether it be in terms of protecting the welfare of human beings (e.g. Fair Trade), or the welfare of the material environment (e.g. Greenpeace).

Ethical responses to the organisation of capital, even global capital, are nothing new. However, it could be argued that ethical responses to global capital loosely focused around consumption practices, despite having some precedence, are relatively novel. Work in disparate fields such as political geography and consumer studies have made some inroads in developing the study of ethical/political consumption. Micheletti (2003) for example, considers such movements to be representative of collective individualization: a new way of doing politics individually which, at the same time utilises global networks. Cova (1997) emphasises the enshortening of supply chains to the point where producer and consumer may become mutually and transparently aware of each other while Wright (2004) argues more critically that the mediation of ethical consumption relies on a problematic refetishization of the commodities involved, reminiscent of colonial imagery.

Throughout this paper issues surrounding everyday ethics and consumption shall be explored. This paper will also approach tourism as a form of consumption: consuming places, spaces, environment and culture (Urry, 1995). This article will investigate if we can conceptualise sustainable tourism as an emerging form of ethical consumption in order to better understand it. Sustainable tourism will be examined as a response to the growing cultural and environmental concerns expressed by the public regarding the impacts of mass consumption and mass tourism. Finally the paper shall offer a post-colonial critique of sustainable tourism in relation to two central concepts associated with the movement– ecological sustainability and human rights.

## **Is sustainable tourism a form of ethical consumption?**

In recent years, ethical consumption has been a growing phenomenon throughout the West (Tallontire et al., 2001) and research into this trend has generated an increasing amount of attention over the past few decades. However, it is widely acknowledged that more extensive engagement with this

trend is needed within the field (Adams and Raisborough, 2008; Cowe and Williams, 2001). This article shall critically engage with sustainable tourism and discuss to what extent it might be understood as a form of ethical consumption. The following section shall offer an initial insight into the historical trajectories and key characteristics of both ethical consumption and sustainable tourism, highlighting possible commonalities and inconsistencies between ethical consumption and sustainable tourism.

## **A shared history?**

The historical origins of ethical consumption appear somewhat contested with various accounts presented from the activity of the Empire Marketing Board (Adams and Raisborough, 2008) to the co-operative movement in the nineteenth century (see for example, Lang and Gabriel, 2005). Many argue that a key moment for ethical consumption was in 1942 in Britain when the Quakers founded Oxfam (Nicholas and Opal, 2005; Lyon, 2006; Raynolds and Long, 2007). Oxfam began purchasing goods such as handicrafts from the disadvantaged producers in the developing world at above-market prices. Purchasing products in such a way allowed for an increased income for the producers and the products were sold onto conscientious consumers in the UK wanting to reduce the impact of their consumption (Raynolds and Long, 2007). The concept was adopted across the Atlantic in 1946 in the USA with the retail outlet Ten Thousand Villages established and various faith groups and networks selling handicraft products with the ethos of a fair price for the producers (Nicholas and Opal, 2005; Lyon, 2006; Raynolds and Long, 2007).

This growing concern for producers was coupled with an increasing awareness of environmental degradation from the 1960s onwards. This attention to the environment was strongly influenced by Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring*, and a growing concern about the detrimental effects of consumerism on the environment (with a particular focus on pesticides) developed across Europe and North America (Cowe and Williams, 2001). It is argued that current levels of consumption in Western societies can be held partly responsible for inequality, environmental degradation, exploitation and socio-economic disparity (Clarke, et al. 2007). This represents a shift in ideology during the latter part of the twentieth century as it previously was production processes which were typically associated with environmental degradation, inequality and exploitation. It was only towards the end of the twentieth century that consumers and mass consumption (in the world's richest nations) began to be identified as major components of the problem (Murphy and Cohen, 2001).

In response to the growing concern towards the end of the twentieth

century, ethical concerns about the exploitation of producers and the environment could now be registered through the purchase of ethical products. For example Cafédirect coffee was launched in 1992 and offered a fairer price (amongst other aspects) for small-scale coffee producers and was sensitive towards the environment in the production process (Lang and Gabriel, 2005). Ethical consumption appears to have developed over the latter half of the last century through various movements both in Europe and North America. Further, it appears that ethical consumption has begun to appeal to a broader market with the introduction of fair trade goods in mainstream supermarkets, for example, Cafédirect. The next section shall briefly highlight a few key moments in the history of sustainable tourism and identify any possible similarities and differences with ethical consumption more generally.

Throughout the history of tourism there have been various shifts in tourism practices. From the Grand Tour of the 17th and 18th centuries (See for example Lofgren, 1999; Towner, 1985; Adler, 1985), to the emergence of the package holiday in the later part of the 20th century (see for example, Barton, 2005; Walton, 2002). More recently a new tourist practice has emerged offering a different outlook on the practices and responsibilities involved in tourism. Initially, tourism was viewed as a clean industry as it did not have such obvious effects on the environment compared to a factory or dock yard. As Honey (1999) highlights ‘...mass tourism was originally embraced by many countries as a ‘smokeless’ (non-polluting) industry that could increase employment and gross national product’ (1999, p. 9). However, it has now become apparent that tourism contributes to worldwide pollution, natural resources depletion, and the exploitation of host workers and local cultures (see for example; France, 1997; Croall, 1995; Mowforth and Munt, 2003; Hunter, 2002a, Hunter 2002b).

This shift in understanding of the effects of mass tourism appears to coincide with the broader environmentalist movement in the 1960s. As highlighted above, environmental concerns appeared to expand during the 1960s with consumption practices being examined in relation to the damage they cause to the environment. It would seem that these concerns expanded into the tourism industry and changed the historical perspective that tourism was a non-polluting industry. In addition, the tourism industry was not only coming under pressure from the environmental movement but concerns were raised surrounding the cultural impact of travelling to foreign countries and the treatment of host country natives (Croall, 1995 and Mowforth and Munt, 2003).

Politically, concerns surrounding human rights and the environment were

arguably brought to the forefront of global attention by the World Commission on the Environment and Development (WCED, 1987) which is more commonly referred to as the Brundtland Report (Cohen, 2001). In this report the Commission argued that a developmental paradigm was needed in order to address issues of environmental degradation, preservation of human rights, address economic progress and alleviating poverty, which again reiterate the concerns of ethical consumption more generally. This paradigm is based around the notion of 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (WCED, 1987, p. 43). Following on from this the Agenda 21 strategy document was a result of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Agenda 21 was the first document to address issues surrounding tourism and sustainability, however within the report there were only a few incidental references to the social and environmental issues generated by international tourism. Agenda 21 was received with severe criticism as it did not meet the aims of the conference mainly due to its non-binding treaties allowing most of the recommendations surrounding climate change and various other cultural issues to be ignored by the international community (Mowforth and Munt 2003).

Within academia, the Journal of Sustainable Tourism was first put to print in 1993 aiming 'to advance critical understanding of the relationships between tourism and sustainable development' (Taylor and Francis, 2008). During the same period the WTO pursued the issue of sustainable tourism and in partnership with the World Travel and Trade Council (WTTC) released Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry in 1996 which influenced the UN Commission on Sustainable Development in 1999, focusing mainly on issues of sustainable tourism (Weaver, 2006). Following the disappointing impact both Agenda 21 documents had on the implementation of international sustainable development a further UN World Summit on Sustainable Development took place in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2002. The discourse employed at the conference appears to highlight similar concerns to the previous summits with the conference concluding:

'From the African continent, the cradle of humankind, we solemnly pledge to the peoples of the world and the generations that will surely inherit this Earth that we are determined to ensure that our collective hope for sustainable development is realized' (UN, 2008).

Concerns around implementing these visions have once again arisen surrounding the need for policies to force change on the international community rather than adopting an opt-in system (Mowforth and Munt, 2003).

With this brief history in mind, it is suggested that there appears to be some commonalities between ethical consumption and sustainable tourism: increased awareness regarding the detrimental effects of consumerism on the environment has influenced the growth of ethical products such as Cafédirect coffee from the 1960s onwards. These concerns are mirrored in relation to the growing acknowledgement of the environmental impact of the tourism industry generating political and academic attention towards the latter part of the twentieth century; in addition, cultural concerns in relation to mass consumerism are at the heart of the development of ethical products and this is also highlighted in the need for culturally sustainable forms of tourism which attempt to reduce the impact of tourism on host communities. Although there appear to be clear commonalities between ethical consumption and sustainable tourism it is not suggested they are exactly the same as they both have their own distinct histories, motivations and practices. The following section shall develop this idea by examining what is meant by ethical consumption and investigate if sustainable tourism shares any of these characteristics.

### **A common definition?**

Ethical consumption is a concept incorporating a number of aspects such as ethical product purchase, boycotts, investment in ethical funds and deposits in ethical banks (Cowe and Williams, 2001; Harrison et al., 2005). When we talk of these different aspects in terms of 'being ethical' a number of key features appear consistently throughout the corpus of definitions. For consumption practices to be defined as ethical they need to incorporate at least one of the key principles surrounding environmental, social concerns/human rights, animal welfare concerns and economic sustainability (Tallontire et al., 2001). More broadly ethical consumption is defined as

*'...any practice of consumption in which explicitly registering commitment towards distant or absent others is an important dimension of the meaning of activity to the actors involved' (Barnett et al., 2005, p. 29).*

Cowe and Williams (2001) extend the definition of ethical to incorporate 'self-interested health concerns' (2001, p. 4) and use the expansion of organic foods to highlight this as they are not only concerned with the environment through pesticides but also the detrimental effects these chemicals have on the individual's personal wellbeing. Further, the ethical concept does not simply mark the production process or the values of the consumer, but is also subject to companies acting ethically across the board including their investment strategies (Clarke et al., 2007). Following this

broad definition of ethical consumption, it appears that it represents a complex set of practices addressing different concerns in a variety of different ways. In relation to this definition, initial suggestions regarding the ethical trajectories of sustainable tourism shall be presented in order to examine the possibility of understanding sustainable tourism as an emerging form of ethical consumption.

Sustainable tourism could be understood as an emerging form of ethical consumption as it adopts social, environmental and economic concerns which are also expressed through the form of consumption. Further, within the sustainable tourism domain I have identified four dominant forces as influencing sustainable tourism which may help to illustrate the parallels between it and ethical consumption. Whilst I also acknowledge there may be additional forces or motivations influencing sustainable tourism in comparison to ethical consumption it would appear that these four forces enable a better understanding of sustainable tourism:

1. Climate change: Due to the rapid growth in international tourism transport concerns have been raised regarding the environmental impact of such travel. For example, according to the WTO (2006) in 1950 there were around 25 million international arrivals compared to 806 million international arrivals in 2005- representing an average annual growth rate of 8.6%. Further, it is now argued that the transport sector of the tourism industry is a major contributor to international greenhouse gas emissions (Gossling et al., 2007).
2. Impact of mass tourism on landscapes: Tourist destinations in countries such as Spain and Thailand provide excellent examples of how mass tourism can change the natural landscape, from high-rise hotels to mass backpacker hostels (France, 1997; Mowforth and Munt, 2003).
3. Growing interest in environmentalism: Sustainable tourism appears to have grown alongside environmental and conservation concerns with an increasing emphasis on conservation work or environmental tours whilst on holiday (Mowforth and Munt, 2003).
4. Cultural and human rights: Cultural sensitivity appears at the forefront of a sustainable holiday. The protection and celebration of indigenous cultures and their traditions appears to have influenced the emergence of sustainable tourism. Further, through cultural projects tourists are able to provide the host communities with the advanced knowledge to develop and enter the post-modern world with the protection of human rights providing the foundations for

such values (Croall, 1995; France, 1997; Mowforth and Munt, 2003; Fennell, 2006)

Therefore, with a broad definition of ethical consumption presented, followed by forces which have influenced sustainable tourism, similarities between ethical consumption and sustainable tourism will now be discussed. Within the definition of ethical consumption it was noted that the environment or green concerns are a key factor in defining a form of ethical consumption. From the forces influencing sustainable tourism the first three factors appear to fit within the environmental and green concern paradigm through carbon emission concerns (force one), natural landscape concerns (force two), and the conservation of natural environments (force three). The social/human rights concerns of ethical consumption in general appear to be expressed through the fourth force influencing sustainable tourism which addresses issues such as cultural sensitivity, cultural protection, development and the protection of human rights. Therefore it would appear that the ethical consumption paradigm could provide a useful framework through which to develop a better understanding of sustainable tourism. However, referring back to the definition of ethical consumption offered by Barnett et al (2005), it appears that other theories maybe needed to further develop this understanding as there appears to be inconsistencies with the fit. For example, a key aspect of ethical consumption is the concern with distant or absent others, within the sustainable tourism paradigm it would appear that the others are not distant or absent, at least physically, as the tourists are actually visiting the other.

Having established a deeper understanding of ethical consumption and offered suggestions as to how sustainable tourism could be conceptualised as an emerging form of ethical consumption, the paper will challenge and critique some of the fundamental assumptions of sustainable tourism by drawing on current post-colonial critiques. The following section of this paper will critically engage with two central themes of sustainable tourism, ecological sustainability and human rights, and apply a post-colonial critique to these concepts.

### **Sustainable tourism: an oxymoron? – A post-colonial critique**

One of the key aims of ethical consumption is to tackle the inequalities that the global capitalist free market is said to create. Within this paradigm there seems to be contradictory ideals. Firstly, it would appear we are turning to consumption in order to tackle the inherent problems with consumption, this can clearly be seen as a problematic approach (Johnston, 2002). In addition, it is argued that ethical consumption is a form of technological



competition in the global market whereby producers must exploit technological advances in order to reduce their impact on the environment and reduce the waste commonly associated with production (Sidwell, 2008). However, this generates its own inequalities as smaller producers are said to be unable to invest the necessary capital into new technologies and the larger companies are able to exploit the gap in the market, therefore the small producers that ethical consumption is said to be helping may in fact be the ones that suffer.

These arguments could be applied to the technologies surrounding sustainable tourism, for example, eco lodges using solar panels etc. More broadly, Goodman and Goodman (2001) argue that ethical consumption simply provides a “green gloss” to the inequalities of production in the current capitalist system. These assessments are by no means an exhaustive account of the critiques surrounding ethical consumption and sustainable tourism; debates surrounding the expense and time constraints of the labelling process (see for example, Nicholas and Opal, 2005; Renard, 2005; Goodman and Goodman, 2001) are also dominant to mention but a few. This section will add to these contemporary debates by putting forward a postcolonial critique of sustainable tourism.

Critiques of third world tourism in general have tended to focus on tourism as signifying a new form of colonialisation: for example by demonstrating how ‘third world’ tourism infrastructures are often owned by developed countries and the suggestion that first world tourists consume ‘third world’ places, spaces and cultures (Mowforth and Munt, 2003). This section shall develop the concept of re-colonialisation through the tourism industry in relation to sustainable tourism. This argument shall start by examining the problematic power dynamics in relation to the current conceptualisation and implementation of ecological sustainability. Following this, the argument shall be extended to unpack the cultural or human rights basis that informs sustainable tourism and will look critically at human rights in relation to the fundamental assumptions the human rights paradigm is based on. From this investigation it is suggested that these central themes to sustainable tourism embody characteristics of colonialism.

## **Ecological sustainability, preservation and western ideals**

Within the sustainable tourism definition it was proposed by the author that there are four key motivations or forces which have been central to the development and conceptualisation of sustainable tourism. Further, it was argued that the first three forces are directly concerned with the detrimental effects the tourism industry has on the natural environment; for example, the

effects of tourist transport on climate change (force one), the impact of mass tourism on landscapes (force two) and the growing interest in environmentalism from the 1960s onwards (force three).

These concerns appear to be relatively neutral in their assumptions and focus solely on the preservation and conservation of the natural environment; however the relationship between humans and the environment within this context warrants further analysis. Within the sustainable tourism domain regarding the impact of tourism on the environment there are fundamental assumptions made by western societies as to what constitutes ecological sustainability and how we are to further knowledge and thus move closer to achieving it. In order to develop knowledge around ecological sustainability, the environment is analysed through western scientific methods which assume an objective, value-free view of the natural world (Yearley, 1991). Within tourism it is now apparent that certain forms adopt this objective view on the environment and promote their products as 'sustainable' or 'eco'. It is within the labelling framework that the western nations can inflict their concepts of what nature should be onto the poorer countries and seemingly cover-up such implementation of power under the green, eco or ethical guise.

These unequal power relations can be seen as a new form of colonialism, or what Sachs (1992; 1993) refers to as eco-colonialism with the survival of the planet providing the perfect backdrop to implement these western values and motivating the world to conform. Consequently, it is through the ideals of ecological sustainability and sustainable tourism that western standards and ideals are imposed on developing nations with conscientious consumption choices enforcing these ideals. Therefore, the objective view of nature and the environment adopted by sustainable tourism to achieve ecological sustainability through sensitivity to the effects of tourism is not objective and does not provide a real view of the natural world (Kuhn, 2007). The reliance upon science to provide an objective evaluation of the environment and allow for the preservation of natural areas can also be seen as the pursuit of technological control over the environment in which capital generated from the development of scientific methods and technology is the primary driving force (Habermas, 1972) and therefore constantly reinforcing the capitalist system whilst also imposing the ideals of capitalism on previously untouched cultures and environments.

Further, ideals of what constitutes the natural environment and natural beauty are based on aesthetic assumptions which are arguably socially constructed, and therefore historically and culturally specific. In our drive to preserve the natural environment we are attempting to freeze or fix biodiversity to what science currently deems as 'natural' (Leist and Holland,

2000). Moreover, although the motivations are different, it is not only the natural environment that we wish to freeze frame, but also the cultures living within the environments. For example, Kuhn (2007) argues that sustainable tourism attempts to preserve traditional cultures in a way that the western tourist deems as 'authentic'. Using the example of an Aboriginal community, she suggests that when tourists are first to encounter a community they deem this as the communities' natural way of being and if that community is to change due to western influence then the community is no longer as natural or authentic; as Kuhn (2007, p. 269) notes, 'We cannot expect indigenous peoples to remain forever frozen as that exotic other that we might wish them to be'.

This preservation of authenticity can be seen in terms of sustainable tourism applying pressure, and thus power, to keep cultures in a particular way and removing the choice and agency of that culture, which reiterates the unequal power relations reminiscent within the colonial period. This idea of visiting untouched or primitive cultures under the guise of culturally educational and sustainable holidays appears to reinforce unequal power relations whilst sampling cultural traditions and ceremonies (See for example, Fennell, 2006; Mowforth and Munt, 2003). For example, these ceremonies and dances are often packaged up, with the inclusion of some local food and transport to the area and sold to the tourists. In addition, the timings of traditional ceremonies are sometimes altered to fit within the tourists schedule and in some cases the traditions altered completely (MacCannell, 1992).

As such, it is suggested that there is a need for a critical analysis of not only the practices involved in sustainable tourism but also a critical analysis of the promotional material surrounding sustainable tourism to establish if these power relations are represented, as has been attempted in relation to ethical consumption more generally. For example, Wright (2004) argues that through attracting potential consumers, advertisements for ethical products draw on certain cultural representations which partially re-present colonial imagery, embedded within unequal power relations. Therefore, ethical labelling and advertising, be it under the guise of the environment or culture, can be seen as a force to reproduce the unequal power relations between the developed and developing world despite the assumption that it is said to be challenging these historical colonial relationships.

## **Cultural and human rights as an enforcer of unequal power relations**

Another emerging criticism surrounding sustainable tourism in relation to

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colonialism boasts similar concerns to the implementation of western ideals on developing countries, but rather than the focus being on the environment and nature, or our desire to freeze frame cultures for our consumption this critique addresses the very essence of human rights promotion. In the definition of ethical consumption listed earlier in this article, the forth force of motivational factor influencing sustainable tourism, human rights, was identified as a central concept to the ethical or sustainable arena. The following section will offer a critical approach to the universalistic assumptions of human rights.

Human Rights in lay thinking appear to be universal values which form the essence of each and every human being. This assumption becomes increasingly problematic when examined in further detail. Common understandings about what a 'human right' actually is appear to be founded on the lay assumption that '...human rights are based on human needs' (Donnelly, 1985, p. 27). This assumption appears attractive to many when conceptualizing basic human rights as human needs can be scientifically determined, for example, you need food and water to live. It is this conception of human rights, allowing an individual to the right to live, that forms the basis of the human rights concept. Moreover, the basic right to food and water is argued to be a belief or moral value that no human should deprive a fellow human from having. Therefore, the assumption is made, that it is within the human nature of all individuals to respect the right of others' basic need to survive, as Donnelly (1985, p. 2) notes, '...socially shared moral conceptions of the nature of the human person and the conditions necessary for a life of dignity are the source of human rights'.

However, the Western origins of human rights is said to be problematic due to its claims of total universality. It has been argued that far from creating a sense of inclusive justice and equality for all human beings, it is human rights that reinforce the power relations that exist in the modern world. In his paper *Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights*, Mutua (2001) argues that human rights and human rights discourses are based around a three dimensional prism. It is this three dimensional prism that is the structure of human rights but also the reason why human rights are not truly universal and are cementing the social and political divisions between the west and the rest. He argues that the first dimension of the prism positions the savage, exemplified by non-western states and developing cultures which within the sustainable tourism domain could be viewed broadly as the primitive host cultures with their outlandish traditions. The second dimension in the prism is the positioned victim that is submissive and their 'naturalistic attributes have been negated by the primitive and offensive actions of the state or the culture foundation of the state' (Mutua, 2001, p. 203). This

second dimension not only presents the victim as somewhat helpless with no power, but also ostracises the primitive nation and their cultural foundations implying they are backward or inferior.

Within the sustainable tourism domain this dimension could be viewed as individuals within the host cultures or on a more abstract level, the natural environment. Mutua (2001) then highlights the third dimension, that of the 'saviour or the redeemer, the good angel who protects, vindicates, civilizes, restrains, and safeguards' (2001, p. 203). Of course, the dimension of the prism being referred to here is that of the ethical, moral, liberal, and enlightened western individuals/states that see themselves as the rescuers for these less-fortunate others living in a state of moral or intellectual darkness. This third dimension could easily be describing the western tourists who embark on a sustainable or ethical holiday to help or save the 'third world' victim. This three dimensional prism of human rights gives an ethical or moral guise to a system which enforces unequal power relations between the west and the rest which were emblematical within colonisation.

Encompassed in the aims and objectives of ethical consumption and sustainable tourism is the promotion of demographic participation. However, Buchanan (2005) highlights that the right to democratic participation should not be viewed as a universal human right, but rather an ideal of western societies. Buchanan uses the example of Asian values and notes that:

*'The implication is that societies in which "Asian values" are predominant can achieve prosperity (that all their members can have the opportunity for a decent life) without democracy' (2005, p. 79).*

In addition, Taylor (1999) claims that due to the western liberal basis for the current human rights concept, there is too much emphasis on individualistic values. The idea of individualism leads rights to be viewed as something individuals can claim from society. Taylor (1999) argues that this concept of claiming rights conflicts with the values of different cultures, such as, Islamic and African, where rights are perceived more as responsibilities and what the community owes to each other (See also, Ignatieff, 2001). Therefore, if we are to adopt the promotion of human rights and demographic participation through the aims and objectives of our ethical products including sustainable tourism, we must also consider just whose rights are we protecting, whose values are we promoting, and are we really offering and equal/fair exchange in this process (Goodman and Goodman, 2001; Leist and Holland, 2000)?

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this article sustainable tourism has been conceptualised as a form of ethical consumption. Following a deeper exploration into the history, aims and objectives of ethical consumption and sustainable tourism it was argued that sustainable tourism shares a number of characteristics with ethical consumption. These similarities include some of the fundamental goals both are striving to achieve, which include a primary concern with regards to both environmental and cultural impacts of mass consumption. Although sustainable tourism has been conceptualised as a form of ethical consumption throughout this article, the author does not intend to claim that this is the only way of conceptualising sustainable tourism and acknowledges variances between the two, particularly in relation to concern for the distant other. It is suggested here that further work into conceptualising sustainable tourism is essential if we are to fully understand and develop the notion.

Following a conceptualisation of sustainable tourism, a post-colonial critique was applied to sustainable tourism in direct relation to ecological sustainability and human rights – both aspects central to sustainable tourism and ethical consumption more broadly. This critique allowed for the examination of power relations within the global society which can operate through seemingly ethical products and labels. This paper does not intend to argue that sustainable tourism is in no way an improvement on previous production-consumption relationships. Rather the author wishes to suggest that a critical approach to sustainable tourism and ethical consumption in general is essential if we are to seriously challenge current global inequalities and fundamentally shift the production-consumption relationships typically associated with the capitalist free-market system. The question still remains regarding the philosophy that consumption itself can offer the solution to the inequalities created by consumption. Currently this area of research is generating increased interest and it is proposed by the author that further research is needed in order to engage with issues of ethics, sustainability, inequality and consumption within tourism.

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