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# Examining an opportunity for collaboration among stakeholders to promote conservation in sea turtle tourism in Gili Trawangan, Lombok, Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

This study focuses on sustainable sea turtle tourism development in small islands, focusing on a case study on Gili Trawangan, Indonesia. All species of sea turtles are globally endangered, largely due to impacts of unsustainable tourism development. Gili Trawangan is an island dependent upon a flourishing marine tourism industry. It is crucial to determine stakeholder perspectives to reveal barriers and influences in tourism development to help promote sea turtle conservation and protect the livelihoods of local communities. The study was conducted in 2010 to examine an opportunity for stakeholder collaboration to promote conservation in sea turtle tourism. The study applied qualitative data methods to deepen the knowledge on stakeholder collaboration in the development of sustainable tourism in small islands. Key findings provide insight on what influences conservation through sea turtle tourism, and recommendations to promote sustainable tourism development in other small islands facing similar situations.

Keywords: Sea turtle, Conservation, Sustainable, Tourism, Collaboration, Stakeholder

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine an opportunity for stakeholder collaboration to promote conservation in the sea turtle tourism industry in Gili Trawangan, Indonesia. This research gains information on sea turtle conservation tourism techniques from around the globe. The focus of this research is on Gili Trawangan due to the tendency for small islands to be dependent upon tourism. This holistic study reveals true stakeholder perceptions and strives towards realistic sustainable sea turtle conservation through the tourism industry. Recommendations using effective information diffusion, and the revelation of comparisons between stakeholder perceptions aims to help overcome important barriers to sea turtle conservation in Gili Trawangan and act as a model for other small islands facing similar barriers.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The tourism industry has continuously developed into a substantial global industry since the 1960s (Davenport & Davenport, 2006; Theobald, 2005). International tourism is the fastest growing and most important tradable sector in the world economy (Shareef & McAleer, 2005; Self et al. 2010). In terms of geographical tourist destinations, coastal tourism attracts the largest percent of tourists each year, allowing for many developing countries (particularly small islands) to gain significant income and other benefits from the trade (Davenport & Davenport, 2006; Barrowclough, 2007; Self et al. 2010). Although tourism is very attractive for small islands to focus on, the consequences of tourism development can have severe impacts on the future of small islands by affecting their livelihoods; there is a serious need for sustainable tourism development in small islands (Scheyvens et al. 2008; Twining-Ward et al. 2002).

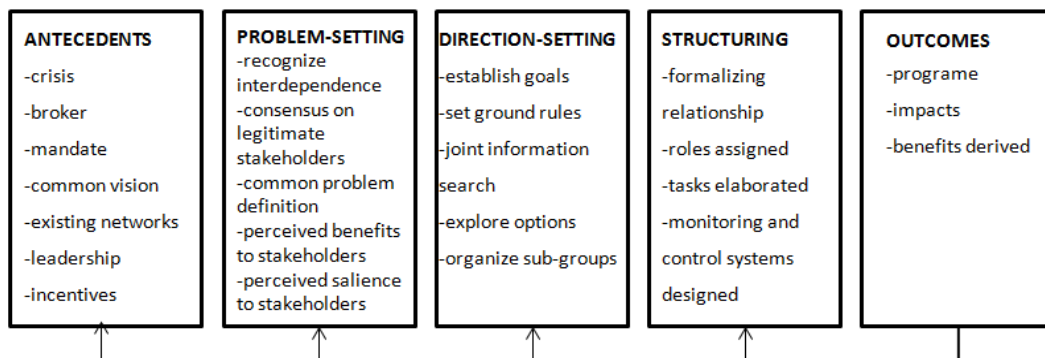
The origin of sustainability has a comprehensive history leading to sustainable tourism development which strives to influence the following five factors, while ensuring that no one

factor dominates: economic health, subjective well being of the locals, unspoilt nature and protection of resources, healthy culture, and optimum guest satisfaction (Hardy & Beeton, 2001). Conservation tourism is a useful method of incorporating tourism practises while also increasing conservation of an area or species.

All species of sea turtles are globally endangered, and are often relied upon as a tourism product: either alive, or dead. Sea turtles are economically worth more to local communities when they are alive and used as a tourism product rather than dead (souvenirs, ornaments and jewellery) (WWF, 2004). Declining sea turtle populations jeopardize jobs, tourism and coastal economies primarily in developing countries, two thirds of which have sea turtles (WWF, 2004). Sea turtle tourism best practises demonstrate that there are methods to utilize live sea turtles as a sustainable tourism product that is beneficial to both local human and sea turtle populations.

Sea turtle tourism best practises rely upon stakeholder collaboration (Choi & Eckert, 2009). The process of collaboration was examined, specifically related to tourism. Selin and Chavez (1995) developed a model of the evolution of tourism partnerships from Gray's (1989) seminal work. They proposed that tourism partnerships progress through 5 stages: antecedents, problem-setting, direction setting, structuring and outcomes, see Figure 1 (Selin & Chavez, 1995; Plummer et al, 2006).

Figure 1: An Evolutionary Model of Tourism Partnerships



(Selin & Chavez, 1995, p 848)

This evolutionary model relies upon a holistic understanding of stakeholder perceptions. As such, stakeholder analysis is very important for this study. Stakeholder analysis has a comprehensive history dating back to the first definitions of a stakeholder (early 1930s), and has since evolved into a comprehensive research field addressing important relations from multiple sides (Preston, 1990; Brugha et al. 2000). Stakeholder analysis has been applied to tourism, mostly as a planning management tool, but also as a form of ethical business management (Sautter & Leisen, 1999; Hardy & Beeton, 2001).

Stakeholder analysis is prominent in wildlife tourism management research. Stakeholder identification and collaboration are important to the success of such practises. Hardy and Beeton (2001) studied stakeholder perceptions of sustainable tourism in the Daintree Region in Australia. Through in-depth interviews, focus groups, and observations (using purposive sampling) of individuals from each stakeholder group, the researchers were able to identify perceptions of each stakeholder group. Differences between primary concerns about tourism in the Daintree area were evident between stakeholder groups, revealing management problems in the area (Hardy & Beeton, 2001). Management strategies for the region were not reflecting all stakeholder perceptions. This study demonstrates the importance of including all stakeholder perceptions into a management strategy in order for it to be successful.

Stakeholders can be a substantial asset to project management, with the ability to provide unique insight, information and support (Bourne & Walker, 2005). Choi and Eckert (2009) state that the following are stakeholders that must be involved in the management of sea turtle tourism: government, coastal residents and communities, NGOs, beach users, and SCUBA dive operators.

In addition to Selin & Chevez's model, areas to gather information from stakeholders include: their use of the resource, their views on other stakeholders' use of the resource, the position, interest, influence, interrelations, networks, and other characteristics of stakeholders (past, present, future) (Grimble et al. 1995; Brugha, 2000). Indirect investigation or observation also helps provide support on if stakeholders' interests reflect their behaviours.

There are a few approaches that Grimble et al. (1995) introduce to help identify stakeholders in natural resource management. An important approach in studying a small island community is the reputational approach which includes asking knowledgeable or important individuals to identify groups they believe have a stake in the issue in question (ex: village headman or elder).

Gili Trawangan has been selected as the small island to focus on for a case study. The island is economically dependent upon tourism; the tourism industry in Gili Trawangan is approximately 95% of the GDP, and more than 80% of the local families are employed by tourism on the island (Graci, 2008). In addition, there is a large prevalence of sea turtles in the waters surrounding Gili Trawangan which is often referred to as the Sea Turtle Capital of the World (World Wildlife Fund Indonesia, 2004).

Gili Trawangan was unoccupied prior to the 1970s, except when it was used by the Japanese in World War II to house prisoners of war and social outcasts (Dickerson, 2008). In the early 1970s, individuals from Sulawesi and Lombok began to inhabit the island to work as farmers or fishermen (Dickerson, 2008). Up until the late 1970s, the Gili Islands relied heavily on the fishing industry to support their economy (Afifi, 2000; Hitchcock et al, 2008). Traditional fishing techniques were used up until the late 1950s including: hand lines, nets, and fish traps. In the early 1960s, mura-ami (blast) fishing technology was introduced alongside seine nets. Together these new fishing technologies allowed for severe marine exploitation and degradation (Afifi, 2000).

There were attempts to harvest the land with coconut trees in the early 1970s, but due to mice and other disturbances, attempts were met with failure and the land was redistributed in 1981 (Dickerson, 2008). Coconut plantations were attempted and failed once again in the late 1970s, and by 1983 the first tourists arrived in Gili Trawangan (Dickerson, 2008).

In 1997, researchers observed that Gili Trawangan was between the 'exploration' and 'involvement' stages of Butler's (1980) S-shaped curve to describe the resort cycle (Hitchcock et al, 2008; Hampton, 1998). While Graci and Dodds (2010) state that Gili Trawangan is in the end stages of the 'development' stage, and approaching the 'consolidation' stage. Rapid increases in facilities as well as tourist numbers and improved accessibility to the island were observed (Graci & Dodds, 2010). In addition, the local community is entirely dependent upon the tourism industry on the island (Graci & Dodds, 2010).

Gili Trawangan lacks research specifically related to stakeholder collaboration regarding sea turtle tourism and conservation; therefore, this case study aims to promote research in the area to contribute to sustainable tourism development in small islands as a whole.

## METHODOLOGY

A multimethod approach was applied, combining causal observation, and interviews to support each other. Observations allowed the researcher to see firsthand how tourism, collaboration, and sea turtle conservation are linked in Gili Trawangan prior to the interviews, and to see the diversity of the population and gain an understanding of local practises. In total, 48 semi-structured interviews were audio recorded in Gili Trawangan during 6 weeks between May 20<sup>th</sup> and July 1<sup>st</sup> 2010. Along with snowball sampling, stakeholders were identified using the reputational approach (Grimble et al, 1995).

A stakeholder for this study is defined as: any group or individual who can affect or is affected by sea turtle tourism or conservation in Gili Trawangan. The final stakeholder groups were defined and created based upon past studies of wildlife conservation tourism stakeholders, and then applied to Gili Trawangan directly. Stakeholder groups determined for sea turtle tourism and conservation in Gili Trawangan included: locals, tourists, environmental NGOs, operators, educators and regulators. Their characteristics, values, demands, actions, and perspectives therefore have an impact on sea turtle tourism and conservation practices. As such, each stakeholder group was very important to understand in this study.

Themes around interview questions drew strongly from the literature review. The questions are largely based on obtaining stakeholder perceptions based on Selin and Chavez's (1995) model in relation to sea turtle tourism and conservation on Gili Trawangan. Interviewees were also asked if they could identify any possible barriers in the success of implementing Best Practises for sea turtle tourism, or any incentives or benefits that may help attain them.

## FINDINGS

Gili Trawangan is dependent upon marine tourism. Divers are attracted to the island by three main marine species: sea turtles, reef sharks and manta rays (Interview # 5, 6, 9, 36, 2010). Sea turtles are seen on the vast majority of dives; however, reef sharks and manta rays are seen infrequently. Because it is nearly a guarantee that sea turtles will be seen, they are the selling point of most marine tourism experiences on the island (Interview # 6, 9, 11, 14, 15, 23, 24, 28, 30, 2010). If tourism was to diminish on the island, 63% of interviewees stated that there would be a serious lack of opportunities on the island and that they would have to move off island to work and live.

The expressed changes in the tourism industry in Gili Trawangan link very closely to Butler's Life Cycle Destination Model. The responses help to identify that Gili Trawangan appears to be within the critical range of elements of capacity. Based on changes in tourist attitudes, Gili Trawangan may be nearing the final stages of the model. In addition to attitudes, many other changes support that Gili Trawangan is near the final stage of the model: tourism is the dominant economic force on the island; international visibility has increased notably; infrastructure has increased catering to the demands of tourists (ex: luxury villas, freshwater access, swimming pools, and air conditioning); tourists are beginning to disturb the local community; and the local community's participation in tourism is declining.

Due to the fairly recent history of tourism on the island, there are no past networks that any stakeholders were able to identify. There is an environmental NGO, the Gili Ecotrust, which strives to develop conservation projects and include multiple stakeholder groups. It is run by expatriates and is primarily a partnership among the 12 existing dive shops on the island. The local population is hardly involved, and sea turtle conservation is not a main focus. There is a

clear divide between expatriates and the local community in Gili Trawangan which impacted responses regarding leadership on the island. Expatriates largely identified an expatriate as the most suitable leader for sea turtle conservation on the island, while locals mostly identified a local regulator.

Current attempts at sea turtle conservation on the island were described as needing improvements by 37% of respondents, and as harmful by 17% of respondents. Barriers to sea turtle conservation were explored and are presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2:** Current barriers to sea turtle conservation on Gili Trawangan

<b>Barrier to sea turtle conservation</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Education</b>	33%
<b>Resources</b>	25%
<b>Communication</b>	21%
<b>Corruption</b>	17%
<b>Business mentality</b>	15%
<b>Time</b>	15%
<b>Transparency</b>	13%
<b>Conflict</b>	10%
<b>Custom/Tradition</b>	10%
<b>Urgency</b>	8%
<b>Development</b>	8%
<b>Fast turnover of people on the island</b>	6%
<b>Responsibility</b>	2%
<b>Effort</b>	2%
<b>DK/NR</b>	17%

n=48

DK/NR: Did not know or No Response

Education, a lack of resources (specifically a lack of money), and language barriers (between tourists, locals, and business owners) were the most frequently expressed barriers. Education of tourists, and locals was also identified as a major barrier. “A problem here is that tourists don’t know that they shouldn’t touch the sea turtles when they go out to see them. I mean, I have guests who come here and say ‘oh I just swam with the turtles and I rode on their back’ that’s just horrendous, and I mean it’s just education...” (Interview # 17, 2010). A local resident explains that locals need more education and knowledge because “they think that they’re helping, but they’re really making it worse” (Interview #36, 2010).

Regulator corruption was an evident barrier, as the head of the village is also the owner and original founder of the turtle hatchery. An operator explains that “everyone on the island has their own relationship with the head [of the island]” (Interview #22, 2010). Many individuals on the island would never criticize the turtle hatchery and risk their good relationship with the head of the island, as they have too much invested in the island to risk any loss (Interview 20, 2010). This is a common barrier to sustainable development in small islands around the world.

Incentives were seen as unnecessary to 96% of respondents to help overcome expressed barriers to sea turtle conservation. Recognition was noted by 4% of respondents as an incentive that may be useful. Besides incentives, increasing education and information available on the island, more funding, and an increase in tourist involvement were all noted by stakeholders as methods to help overcome expressed barriers.

Stakeholders identified relationships, local participation, communication, corruption and lack of transparency as potential problems with stakeholder collaboration for sea turtle conservation and tourism on Gili Trawangan. Overall, 56% of respondents stated that they believe that collaboration for sea turtle conservation and tourism is realistic in Gili Trawangan. 19% express that it is realistic, but only if an expert (a skilled and knowledgeable individual or group) gets involved. 4% stated that collaboration was not realistic, while the remaining 21% stated that they were unsure.

## CONCLUSIONS

Interviews revealed conflicting perspectives especially regarding leadership, importance, and management of sea turtles on Gili Trawangan. A general lack of education regarding sea turtles was evident. Key themes and barriers that emerged during this research identify that education, regulatory corruption, high turnover of locals and expatriates living on the island, and management structure, all hinder the conservation of sea turtles through tourism practises despite the importance of sea turtles to the livelihoods of stakeholders on the island.

Multiple stakeholders, specifically operators, are unable to see the link between the marine environment and sea turtles to their own livelihoods. Many operators expressed a link between their business and tourism; however, they lack the ability to understand that it is the marine environment, and largely the sea turtles, that are primarily drawing tourists to the island. Being able to spot sea turtles so consistently is very unique and not common in many locations around the world, therefore, without sea turtles, the island lacks uniqueness. Stakeholders stated that if sea turtles were to disappear, tourist arrivals would likely decline.

The current attempts at sea turtle conservation through tourism, although developed with good intentions, are contributing to stakeholder dissatisfaction, and resulting in tension between stakeholder groups. Stakeholder perceptions that were revealed in this study need to be incorporated into the current management of sea turtle tourism in small islands. The study revealed that stakeholders (especially tourists and operators) will be more supportive (financially and practically) of a project that is clearly dedicated to sea turtle conservation rather than to a project that involves potentially unsustainable sea turtle tourism. The incorporation of this study's findings could lead to the development of successful stakeholder collaboration to help overcome the current barriers to sea turtle conservation in Gili Trawangan, and consequently in small islands facing similar issues.

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