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Contradictory Conception and Implementation of Ecotourism in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

As one of the biological hotspots and a developing country in the world, Sri Lanka has practiced ecotourism since late 1980s as a remedy for solving the existing socio-cultural, economic issues and conserving biodiversity. Ecotourism brings foreign exchange, develops the tourist industry, provides jobs both locally and nationally, and provides a method to use forest areas compatible with conservation and to deter illegal timber felling and poaching. Over the last four decades, ecotourism has developed gradually in Sri Lanka. Thus, the primary objective of the concept paper was to understand ‘how Sri Lanka ecotourism stakeholders have conceptualized and implemented ecotourism concept’. To achieve the objective, first, contradictory conceptions of ecotourism by Sri Lanka ecotourism stakeholders were illustrated; then, the article reviews the contradictory implementation of the ecotourism concept in Sri Lanka based on the literature and the experiences of the authors. The research revealed that Sri Lanka ecotourism stakeholders have comprehended and executed ecotourism concept differently. The contradictory conception and implementation of ecotourism have led to emerging genuine ecotourism and defective ecotourism destinations in terms of multidimensional sustainability.

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1. Introduction

Ecotourism is an alternative type of tourism that emerged in the world’s nature conservation movement of the 1970s and 1980s. From a broad sense, ecotourism is defined as nature visitation (sightseeing and facilitating to those who visit the natural areas) for enjoying and appreciating nature (including present and past socio-culture, wildlife, natural features, and natural history of the destinations) (see Figure 1). At the same time, from the definite meaning, ecotourism is defined as a

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nature-based specific type of nature visitation which targets nature conservation, nature-based education, and providing benefits to the local community (supporting locals to solve their socio-economic issues and ensuring their human rights). In the study, the specific type of nature visitation that targets nature conservation, education, and local community's welfare improvement, is identified as genuine ecotourism while other types of nature visitations are identified as defective ecotourism.

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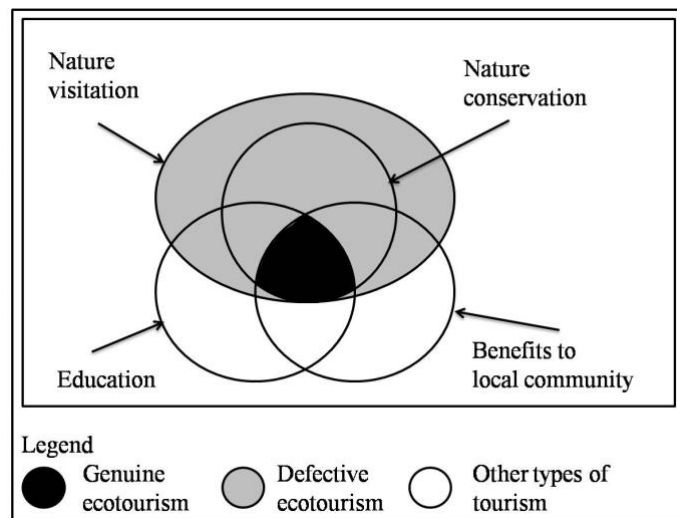


Figure 1. Main elements of genuine ecotourism and defective ecotourism

Therefore, theoretically, ecotourism is a nature-friendly tourism that seeks nature-based education, nature conservation, using natural areas wisely, and improvement of local's welfare; it is a good method for protecting and preserving nature and any existing culture; it does not tolerate aggressive development; it involves field experience and education regarding nature and existing socio-culture; it is a specialized field of tourism based on specific natural areas; it places attention to achieve multidimensional sustainability through visiting relatively natural areas which has an amazing diversity of wild lives and socio-cultural features, and/or facilitating to those who visit such places with the purposes mentioned above. Many stakeholders have involved in the business as customers, investors, facilitators, regulators, and many others who get affected by the business. However, they have conceptualized and implemented the ecotourism concept differently. This process has dragged some ecotourism businesses and destinations away from the ultimate objectives of ecotourism. In other words, ecotourism stakeholders have created genuine ecotourism destinations and defective ecotourism destinations. As various stakeholders perceive the ecotourism concept differently, their implementations of the concept also differ (Boo, 1990; Lindberg, 1991, cited in Bandara, 2009b; McNeely *et al.*, 1992, Weaver, 2001b, Blamey, 2001; Tisdell, 2003; Honey 2008; Simpson, 2009; Williams and Lew, 2015).

Researchers have identified that a considerable number of ecotourism stakeholders in Sri Lanka such as hoteliers, eco-resort owners, and tour operators use 'ecotourism' term as a label without genuinely practicing its principles. Various stakeholders have offered a few numbers of components of the ecotourism concept and neglected some essential components. As per some researchers, such as Arachchi *et al.* (2015d), Sri Lanka has failed to exploit the potential socio-economic, cultural, and environmental benefits of ecotourism due to the narrow conceptualization. According to Pathmanandakumar (2017, p. 26) 'tourism resources are not properly utilized even though country has huge potential for ecotourism development.' Bandara (2009b, p. 475) says that 'although there is a significant potential to develop ecotourism in the island, Sri Lanka has failed to capitalize on this, despite the expansion of the ecotourism industry which has grown in the recent years.' In this way, various stakeholders have positively or negatively contributed to evolving Sri Lanka ecotourism since the 1980s. Sri Lankan governmental institutions and international agencies have taken some efforts to regulate ecotourism practices. But, thereby, they have also misused the ecotourism concept for marketing other types of tourism products.

2. Contradictory conceptions of ecotourism by ecotourism stakeholders in Sri Lanka

According to Sri Lanka Tourism Board (2003, p. 26), the primary stakeholders involved in the Sri Lanka ecotourism are local and foreign visitors, government administrative bodies (national, provincial, local council), state-centered agencies related to tourism (such as Sri Lanka Tourism Board), forest and wildlife management agencies (mainly the Forest Department and the Department of Wildlife Conservation), non- governmental organizations, local communities, researchers, and academic institutions, and others. Sri Lanka Tourism Board (2003, p. 26) has categorized the ecotourism stakeholders into four broad categories. The categories are the business community (operators, investors, and developers), visitors (local and foreign tourists), host population (residents), and government agencies (who manage the destination). However, the stakeholder list is an incomplete one, because it has excluded some crucial stakeholders, such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Thus, based on the literature, the stakeholders of Sri Lanka's ecotourism can be categorized into six

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categories: namely, visitors (tourists), state-centered stakeholders, outside tourism facilitators, local community, international agencies, and researchers and planners. They have conceptualized and implemented the ecotourism concept differently.

Table 1 indicates how Sri Lanka ecotourism stakeholders have conceptualized the ecotourism concept. It emphasizes the diversity of ecotourism definitions as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the definitions. In addition to that, the definitions provide the answers to several critical questions related to ecotourism from the perspectives of state-centered agencies, researchers, NGOs, facilitators, and host communities.

Table1. Contradictory conceptions of ecotourism concept in Sri Lanka

Category	Agency or informant	Definition
State agencies	National Ecotourism Policy (Ministry of Tourism, 2003, p. 15)	'Travel to natural and cultural areas that conserve the environment and improve the well-being of local communities.'
	Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (Wickramasinghe, 2009, p. 30)	'Responsible travel to natural and cultural areas that conserve the environment and improve the well-being of local communities.'
	Forest Department (Wickramasinghe, 2009, p. 30)	No special definition is presented, but the policy stresses that tourism activities should be 'nature-based to the extent that it does not damage the environment and provides benefits to the local populations'
	Department of Wildlife Conservation (Wickramasinghe, 2009, p. 30)	'Nature-based tourism that is sustainable includes environmental education and supports conservations.'
	A University lecturer (Interviewed in January 2017)	'A kind of responsible business that marketing spatial variation.'
NGO	Sri Lanka Ecotourism Foundation (Gurusinghe, 2001, p. 22)	'Ecotourism is tourism and recreation that is both nature-based and sustainable, and sustainability incorporates environmental, experimental, socio-cultural, and economic dimensions. ... (it) involves interpretation and education of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable.'
	Ecotourism Society of Sri Lanka (Wickramasinghe, 2009, p. 30)	'Responsible travel to natural and cultural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people.'
Outside tourism facilitators	A manager of an ecotourism resort (Interviewed in January 2017)	'Ecotourism is a responsible business that markets nature and culture with the help of local people and other responsible agencies. All those who involve in the business as sellers and buyers have responsibilities to minimize the pollution of destination conditions, to protect destination resources that ecotourism depends on, to eradicate the place's poverty and people's poverty, and to give opportunities to tourists to live with nature and local people and to understand the nature and local socio-cultural wealth of rural area.'
Outside tourism facilitators	Manager of an ecotourism resort, (Interviewed in January 2017)	'A responsible business which is marketing destination's resources while contributing to conservation, reproduction, and enhancing its resource base.'
	Hoteliers and eco-resort managers (Archchi, 2015d, p. 175)	'Ecotourism is equal to nature-related tourism, environmental conservation tourism, wildlife conservation tourism, and nature and culture related tourism.'
Host community	The aboriginal community leader (Interviewed in January 2017)	'Multiple responsible traveling and hospitality activity that involve villagers, visitors, facilitators, and others; it is a group-work.'

First, the definitions describe what ecotourism is; whether it is travelling activity, business, or hospitality activity. In the opinion of the state-centered stakeholders and non-governmental organizations, ecotourism is a travelling activity. According to Sri Lanka Tourism Board (2003, p. 6), it consists of a vast array of recreational and educational activities. The Sri Lanka Tourism Board has classified the activities into five categories (see Figure 2) as nature and culture observation and interaction, water-based ecotourism, land-based ecotourism, wildlife viewing based ecotourism, and community-based ecotourism. In general, natural and cultural tangible and intangible characteristics of destinations are marketed as ecotourism products. In addition to that, adventure (hiking, caving, diving, cycling, and river rafting) and traditional cultural activities

(such as traditional agriculture, medicinal practices, and backyard industry) are essential ecotourism products. However, the state-centered stakeholders' definitions do not emphasize the responsibilities of host communities and facilitators that have to be done in ecotourism. From ecotourism facilitators and researchers, ecotourism is a business of marketing accommodation, foods, tour guide service, transportation, and other services. The aboriginal community leader has identified ecotourism as a hospitality activity rather than a business which tries to maximize the profits.

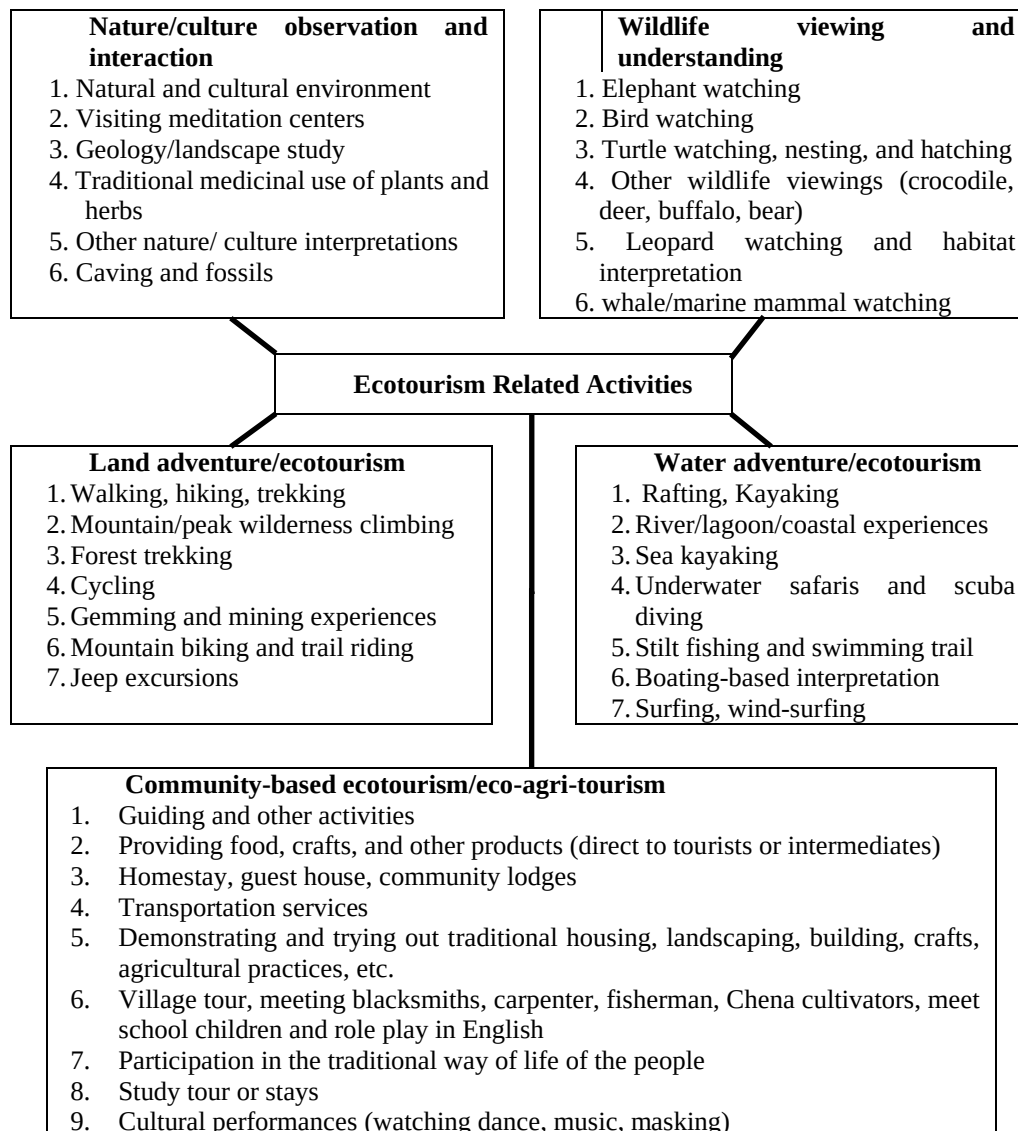


Figure 2. Ecotourism related activities in Sri Lanka (Sri Lanka Tourism Board, 2003, p. 6)

Second, the definitions describe the place where recreational activities or facilitating business or hospitality activities are occurring. As per the descriptions, all stakeholders have identified the areas where have unique characteristics in nature and socio-culture as ecotourism destinations.

Third, the definitions describe the diversity of responsibilities highlighted by different stakeholders. According to the ecotourism principles, everyone must act responsibly because the ecotourism occurred in unique natural and cultural areas. All stakeholders have a responsibility to change some aspects of destinations (such as improving living standards of local people and discouraging forest-damaging economic activities) and to conserve other elements (such as preserving the socio-cultural and environmental wealth). Government agencies and NGOs have highlighted nature conservational and the local economic responsibilities of tourists. But marketing and socio-cultural responsibilities have been ignored. However, the ecotourism resort manager and the aboriginal community leader have emphasized the socio-cultural responsibility of ecotourism. The ecotourism resort manager has identified their educational responsibility too.

Fourth, it describes who should execute the ecotourism responsibilities. According to the state-centered stakeholders' definitions, tourists should behave as responsible customers. But, the definitions have not forced local communities and facilitators to act responsibly. In contrast, the host community members have identified ecotourism as group work. Thus, not only tourists but also facilitators and others should complete their responsibilities to achieve the expected objectives of

ecotourism.

Above mentioned information revealed that many of ecotourism definitions, including the official ecotourism definitions of the state-centered stakeholders, do not adequately address the integral elements of ecotourism such as socio-cultural responsibility, local economic responsibility, active community participation, and responsible marketing (including education). In addition to that, various groups in the same stakeholder category have also understood ecotourism in different ways; for example, although some eco resort managers have identified the ecotourism as a broad concept, as Arachchi *et al.* (2015d) mentioned, other eco resort managers have identified ecotourism as a narrow concept. The contradictory conceptions of the idea have dragged the ecotourism away from its genuine objectives. Thus, it is clear that some agents hinder the sustainability of socio-culture, economy, and environment of destinations as well as ecotourism business.

3. Contradictory implementation of ecotourism

The public agencies (state-centered stakeholders) do a vital role in ecotourism in Sri Lanka. Steele *et al.* (1998) and Wickramasinghe (2009) have categorized the state-centered stakeholders into three categories: tourism regulating agencies, biodiversity and culture managing agencies, and regional administrative agencies. There is a vast array of public agencies that bear the legal responsibility for conserving forest biodiversity in the country (Breuste and Jayathunga, 2010, p. 264). Among them, Forest Department and the Department of Wildlife Conservation execute the forest and biodiversity conservation policy and regulations such as the National Forest Policy in 1995, the Forest Ordinance and the National Wilderness Heritage Act in 1988, Wildlife Policy in 1990, and Flora and Fauna Protection Ordinance in 1964. The Central Environment Authority (CEA) bears the responsibilities for protecting and managing the environment under the power given by the National Environment Act of 1980, its amendments in 1988, and 2000.

Opening or closing the natural forest areas to tourists is determined by the decisions of the state-centered stakeholders. In other words, they do a gatekeeping role of ecotourism in Sri Lanka. The National Forest Policy of 1980 has provided legal rights to the Forest Department and the Department of Wildlife Conservation to take decisions regarding opening or closing natural forests for recreational activities. However, the agencies did not pay sufficient attention to ecotourism until 1995. The Sri Lanka government commenced a national forest policy by opening forests for ecotourism in 1995. Since then, the state-centered stakeholders, especially the Ministry of Tourism, Forest Department, Department of Wildlife Conservation, Central Environmental Authority (CEA), Department of Coast Conservation and Coastal Resource Management, and the Ministry of Culture and Arts (MOCA) have made many efforts to develop ecotourism in the country. The provincial councils and the local councils also do a vital role in facilitating and regulating ecotourism activities. The Ministry of Tourism and the Sri Lanka Tourist Board or the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority are responsible agencies for monitoring tourism, conducting research, international affairs, developing tourism sales and developing tourism products. Thereby, to uplift the profile of ecotourism, the Ministry of Tourism declared the year 2000 as the 'Year of Ecotourism' (Lai, 2002, p. 212). After holding the 13th Pacific Asia Travel Association Ecotourism Conference and Travel Mart in Colombo in February 2001, Sri Lanka received a tremendous ecotourism attraction from the world (Lai, 2002, p. 212).

With the hope of creating a good background for ecotourism in the country by solving the constraints and issues, Sri Lanka Tourism Board (Sri Lanka Tourism Board, 2003) formulated the 'Ecotourism Development Strategy of Sri Lanka.' In this regard, the report suggested preparing seven documents or legal frameworks, as follow:

- National ecotourism policy,
- National ecotourism regulations,
- National ecotourism site development guidelines,
- An inventory for ecotourism sites in the Southern Region,
- A strategy for ecotourism for Sri Lanka (focusing on the Southern Region),
- A series of ecotourism development and action plan for selected priority sites (including community development and environmental protection),
- A marketing strategy and action plan.

Thereby, the Ministry of Tourism of Sri Lanka drafted the National Ecotourism Policy in 2003 by defining the concept of ecotourism and summarizing the objectives and activities. The National Ecotourism Policy has pursued the following objectives (Ministry of Tourism, 2003, p. 15).

- To promote and facilitate the development of ecotourism sites, activities, and facilities in a manner that is consistent with the principles of ecotourism.
- To educate all stakeholders that are required to develop a thriving industry in Sri Lanka.
- To expand the range of ecotourism products, services, and facilities available in Sri Lanka.
- To increase the number of Sri Lankans involved in ecotourism and to facilitate the development of community-owned and managed ecotourism enterprises.
- To contribute to and influence a more sustainable form of tourism in Sri Lanka through a diverse range of measures, including incentives, education, guidelines, regulations, and marketing.

- To contribute to the conservation of natural ecosystems.

Further, all ecotourism stakeholders were forced by the national ecotourism policy to follow the eight principles set out below in their planning, development, and management activities (Ministry of Tourism, 2003, p. 15).

- Minimizing and alleviating negative environmental, social, and cultural impacts.
- Optimizing revenues for industry and re-investment in conservation.
- Optimizing the active involvement of the local community and equitable distribution of economic benefits to local communities.
- Educating visitors and citizens about the importance of conserving Sri Lanka's natural and cultural heritage.
- Promoting ethical behaviors and responsibilities towards the natural and cultural environment.
- Managing tourism operations such that there are long-term benefits to resource, industry, and the local community.
- Delivering high quality value-for-money, enlightening, and participatory natural resources and culture-based experience for visitors.
- Encouraging travel in a spirit of humanity, respect, and learning about local hosts, their culture, and the natural environment.

Since 2003, Sri Lanka develops the tourism sector through a new strategy called 'Tourism Cluster Establishment.' Under the strategy, the Sri Lankan government has implemented ecotourism projects, especially establishing eco-lodges, visitor interpretation centers, and research stations (such as in Deniyaya). Sri Lankan government has identified the need for their intervention in establishing pilot best practice ecotourism projects and in establishing standards for eco-lodges to develop Tourism Cluster in Sri Lanka. However, according to Wickramasinghe (2014), 'the present legislative framework is not comprehensive enough to provide legal regulations for forest-based ecotourism. The National Environment Act (No. 47, 1980) provides legal regulations for only mass tourism activities and small-scale tourism activities, but ecotourism is ignored.' In addition to that, 'present environment and tourism policies are not adequate to address the issues of the possible negative environmental and socio-cultural impacts of forest-based ecotourism.'

Furthermore, with hopes of developing the tourism sector sustainably, Sri Lankan government has commenced the Tourist Development Act-Amendment (No. 25 of 2003), Tourism Development Levy Act (No. 11 of 2004), and the New Tourism Act (No. 38 of 2005). The Tourism Act of 2005 replaced the Sri Lanka Tourist Board Act (No. 10 of 1966). Under the act, the Sri Lanka government set up four new tourism boards; Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau, Sri Lanka Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management, and Sri Lanka Convention Bureau. In addition to that, the act has included several other features related to tourism, such as establishing the Tourism Development Fund, Tourism Advisory Committee, and Commissioner for Tourism Administration, and Tourist Police Division.

Although Sri Lankan government took several efforts to develop ecotourism sector in Sri Lanka, it has faced several constraints since the 1980s. As indicated in Figure 3, the number of tourists visiting Sri Lanka hovered around 200,000 to 500,000 per year from 1970 to 2009. In 2000, Sri Lanka had 400,414 foreign tourists, and about 1 % of them were Eco tourists (Arachchi *et al.*, 2015d, p. 170). From 1983 to 2009, Sri Lanka suffered from the Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Elam (LTTE) civil war (Adriana, 2014). In addition to that, the 26th of December 2004, the Indian Ocean Tsunami hit the coastal area of the country and killed more than 35,000 people. After failing the peace talks held in Geneva in October 2006, the Sri Lanka government launched a massive offensive in Eastern and Northern provinces of the country to eradicate LTTE terrorists. In 2008, the Sri Lanka government declared the victory over LTTE. Apart from the war situation of the country, the 2008-2009 period is well known as the worst global financial crisis period since the Great Depression of the 1930s (Dullien *et al.*, 2010). These constraints hindered the growth of the ecotourism sector of the country.

After the eradication of terrorism from the country in 2008, Sri Lanka attracts a large number of tourists every year. Sri Lankan government, non-governmental organizations, and international agencies have declared several programs to attract tourists. Sri Lanka Ecotourism Foundation (SLEF), in partnership with Sri Lanka Tourism Board and The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), held the Asia-Pacific Regional Ecotourism Conference (APREC 2009) in Colombo (Gurusinghe, 2009). In 2011, Sri Lankan government formulated a 'Five Year Master Plan' for creating an environment conducive for tourism, for attracting right type of tourists, ensuring departing tourists' happiness (confirming the expectation of tourists), improving domestic tourism, and upgrading the image of the country among the global community and tourists (MOED, 2011). Also, the Sri Lankan government declared the year 2011 as the 'Visit Sri Lanka 2011' (Hohler and Mai, 2011a and 2011b). Through the campaign, the Sri Lankan government expected to promote eight tourism products, including ecotourism under the theme of '8 Wonderful Experiences in 8 Wonderful Days'. Thereby, in 2011, the number of tourists visiting the country raised to about 850,000 tourists, which reached beyond 2.3 million tourists in 2018 (SLTDA, 2019).

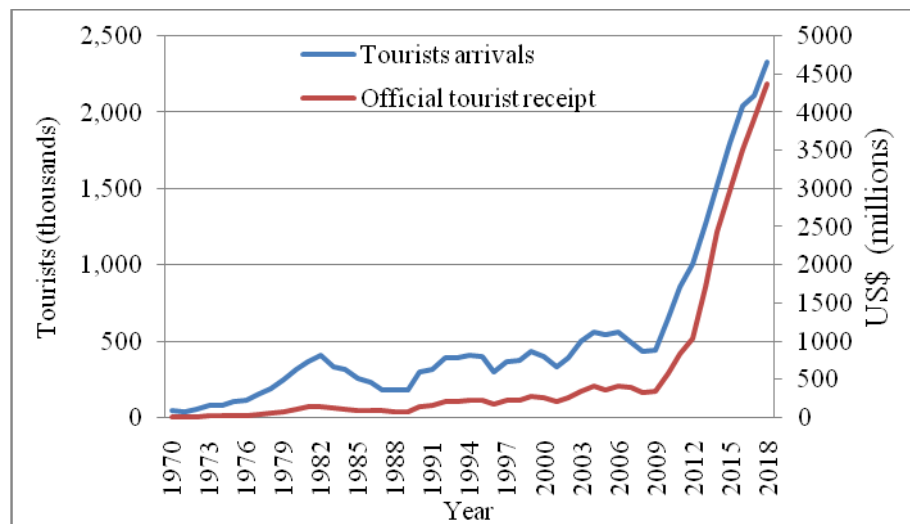


Figure 3. Tourism arrivals and tourist receipt of Sri Lanka from 1970 to 2018 (adapted from Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2019)

The influences of the state-centered stakeholders in ecotourism activities vary from destination to destination. In some destinations, state agencies have involved in ecotourism as more active business partners; Minneriya, Yala, Udawalawa are examples. However, their involvement in some destinations is very passive; they have only involved in nature conservation or regulating tourism activities. Some ecotourism destinations in Knuckles forest, including Meemure, are examples. In some destinations, the influences of the state-centered stakeholders have been increased or decreased from time to time. For example, due to the war, some parks in northern and eastern provinces were closed for a long period. After initiating some ecotourism destinations (for example, Dambana), the state-centered stakeholders have delegated the responsibilities to local communities to conduct ecotourism activities. Sri Lanka Tourism Board regulates the accommodation and tourism businesses in some areas, but their involvements in other regions are meagre. In some areas, the state-centered stakeholders' tourism regulations and standardization activities have dragged the hard ecotourism destinations towards soft ecotourism destinations.

The second stakeholder category is visitors. Tourists or visitors are the customers of any tourism product. In 2018, the total number of foreign tourist arrivals was about 2.33 million. However, unfortunately, none of the responsible agencies systematically collect information about the eco-tourists arrival to the country. As indicated in Table 2, about 1.4 million local tourists (18% of total domestic tourists) and 0.8 million foreign tourists (15% of total foreign tourists) have visited natural forest areas in the country in 2016. If the zoological gardens and the botanical gardens (such as Huggala botanical garden, Pinnawala elephant orphanage, Udawalawa – Elephant Transit Home, and Peradeniya botanical garden) are also considered as ecotourism destinations, the figure is very high. In addition to that, the data reveals another dimension of ecotourism in Sri Lanka. It is that many travelers (especially foreigners) have many traveling purposes including ecotourism purposes as well as non-ecotourism purposes. For example, the total foreign tourist arrival in 2016 was about 2.1 million. The total number of foreign tourists who visited the tourism destination in the same year was 13 million. Thus, it is obvious that the ecotourism market segment has overlapped with other types of market segments (SLTB, 2003, p. 7).

Through ecotourism development, tourists have produced a considerable amount of income to the government. The tourism sector is the third most significant source of foreign exchange earner of the Sri Lanka economy (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2017, p. 15). The total ticket revenue created by the wildlife park was about 10% of the total tourism ticket revenue of the country in 2016 (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2016). As indicated in Table 2, the economic contribution of foreign tourists was very high compared to domestic tourists. The total tourism revenue for 2017 was about Rs 598,356 million (US \$ 3,924 million) (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2018). It was 14.8% of the total foreign exchange earnings of the country in 2017. In addition to that, about 388,487 employment opportunities (both direct and indirect) had been created by the tourism sector in the country in 2018 (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2019). Thus, it is clear that, although there is no specific statistical information, eco-tourists play a vital role in the economy of the country.

Table 3 lists the relative importance of the market regions and the top ten source markets according to international visitor arrivals. As indicated in the table, the Western Europe region holds the most significant market share while the South Asian region follows it. In 2017 about 67% of tourists had come from Top-Ten source market countries, namely India, China, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Australia, Maldives, Russia, USA, and Netherland in respectively.

In addition to that, 43% of foreign tourists were in the 20-39 age groups, and 33% were in the 40-60 age groups (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2017, p. 26). According to Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (2017, p. 28), a considerable number of foreign tourists were professions (33%), educationalists (19%) and scientists and technicians (5%). The average period of stay in the country was 10.9 days (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2017, p. 24). North

American, Western European, and Australian tourists had stayed more than the average period of stay (14.4, 12.3, and 12.2 days, respectively) (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2017, p. 25). At the beginning of the millennium, the UK and Europe were the main source markets for Sri Lanka ecotourism (Sri Lanka Tourism Board, 2003, p. 18). However, now, the United States, Western Europe, Canada, and Australia are considered as the primary source markets.

Table 2. Tourist arrivals and tourism revenue in Sri Lanka in 2016

Destinations*	No. of visitors (1000)		Ticket revenue (Rs/million)		Total visitors (1000)	Total revenue (Rs/million)
	Local	Foreign	Local	Foreign		
Museums	342.5	60.0	5.4	33.6	402.5	39.0
Cultural triangle	976.9	905.3	38.0	3363.3	1882.3	3401.3
Zoological gardens	2544.0	2959.7	230.0	1071.0	5503.7	1301.0
Botanical gardens	2593.2	465.4	115.4	59.4	3058.7	709.7
Wildlife parks	1406.1	783.2	70.0	1446.0	2189.3	1516.0
Total	7862.8	5173.7	458.8	6508.2	13036.5	6967.0

* Not all destinations are included

Source: Adapted from SLTDA (2016)

Table 3. Relative importance source market regions and top ten source markets for the tourism of Sri Lanka in 2017

The relative importance of market regions		Top – ten source markets	
Region	%	Country	%
America-North	4.9	India	18.2
Europe-West	32.2	China	12.7
Europe-East	7.6	United Kingdom	9.5
Middle East	4.5	Germany	6.2
Asia -South	24.5	France	4.6
Asia - North East	15.7	Australia	3.8
Asia - South East	5.3	Maldives	3.8
Australasia	4.3	Russia	2.8
Other	0.9	USA	2.7
		Netherlands	2.4
		Others	33.3
Total	100.0	Total	100.0

Source: Adapted from SLTDA (2017, p. 19-21)

Vidanage *et al.* (1995), Arachchi *et al.* (2015b), Perera *et al.* (2012), and Perera and Vlosky (2013) have evaluated the tourists' ecotourism commitments in Sri Lanka ecotourism destinations. Perera *et al.* (2012) have studied the motivational and behavioral profiles of a group of tourists who visited Sinharaja natural world heritage site, Horton plains national park, Minneriya national parks, and Yala national park. As per their study, '*a significant number of individuals visiting the destinations do not fall within the boundaries of eco-tourist definitions*' (Perera *et al.*, 2012, p. 263) and some of them are picnickers, egoistic tourists, and adventure tourists. Thus, it is clear that natural destinations attract all kind of tourists, including irresponsible tourists.

The majority of ecotourists are not hard ecotourists (Perera and Vloskey, 2013). In addition to that previous visits, trip quality, satisfaction, and perceived value are essential predictors of their intention to visit, to recommend Sri Lanka ecotourism destinations, and to engage in ecotourism in Sri Lanka in the future (Perera and Vloskey, 2013, p. 19). However, among the predictors, trip quality has tended to influence the tourists' future behavioral intentions profoundly. The trip quality includes conservational or educational activities, staff or volunteers, amenities or infrastructure (such as access roads, bird watching platforms, educational facilities, eco lodge and so on), cleanliness, and quality of information. Therefore, the majority of visitors to forest-based attractions in Sri Lanka fall into the category of soft or causal ecotourists (Perera and Vloskey, 2013). Further, the researchers have observed a strong positive relationship between previous visits and future behavioral intentions. They have recommended ecotourism operators to enhance the quality of ecotourism products in such a

way to give better value for the price. Thereby, tourists' soft ecotourism demand has also dragged the pristine ecotourism destinations towards soft ecotourism. 9

The third stakeholder category is the outside tourism facilitators who involve in ecotourism businesses or other types of tourism businesses as operators, investors, and developers. Food and accommodation providers, transport service providers (including aviation, land and marine transport service providers), tourism information providers, tour guides, and trip organizers are considered as outside tourism facilitators. The main characteristic of the stakeholders is that they are not members of the local communities of ecotourism destinations. As Wickramasinghe (2009), Sri Lanka ecotourism sector largely depends on outside tourism facilitators' resources. Bandara (2009), and Arachchi *et al.* (2015b; 2015d) have evaluated eco-resort and eco-lodge accommodation providers' role in ecotourism of Sri Lanka. According to them, outside tourism facilitators can be considered as a medium that links tourists and destinations. Majority of tourism trade communities are outsiders in relation to the destination communities (local communities). Arachchi *et al.* (2015a) and Arachchi (2015) have identified that Sri Lankan hoteliers have perceived ecotourism narrowly and believed that the concept is equal to nature-related tourism, environment conservation tourism, wildlife-related tourism, and nature or culture related tourism. The narrow conceptualization has led to diverting ecotourism practices away from the global ecotourism standards. The weak ecotourism commitments of the majority of outside tourism stakeholders have dragged some ecotourism businesses away from the genuine ecotourism.

The fourth stakeholder category is the local community. Bandara (2009a), World Tourism Organization (2003), Wickramasinghe (2009) and Kumara (2016) have researched local communities as a group of stakeholders of Sri Lanka ecotourism. Local communities are sometimes considered as suppliers of ecotourism related services. There are local community-owned facilities or services, such as food and accommodation, transportation, communication, and craft product marketing. In some destinations, local communities have been organized by other stakeholders for conducting ecotourism businesses: for examples, *Sinharaja Sumituro Society in Kudawa* (Kumara, 2016), *Walawa Nadee Ecotourism Association in Ambalantota* (Sirisoma, 2012), and *Ranpathwila Ecotourism Foundation* (Wickramasinghe, 2009).

According to the theoretical explanations on ecotourism, the local community is one of the targeted beneficiary groups of ecotourism projects. The local communities and their socio-culture are considered as ecotourism attractions. However, in some destinations, local communities are not ecotourism facilitators. In some destinations, they have been intentionally excluded from ecotourism by other stakeholders. Also, ecotourism has produced positive and negative influences on local communities. In some ecotourism destinations, local communities protect the ecotourism allure of the destinations from the adverse effects of irresponsible tourism; they have become the guardians of the destinations. But in other places, they have also engaged in damaging ecotourism attractions.

The fifth stakeholder category is the international community and institutions. Governmental and non-governmental international stakeholders have influenced Sri Lanka ecotourism sector in several ways. They have influenced the state-centered stakeholders to regulate the ecotourism activities in the country. Sri Lanka is a member country of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) since 1975. Thus, as a member country, Sri Lanka has to follow the rules and recommendations of the UNWTO. The declaration of the year 2002 as the *International Year of Ecotourism* by the United Nations is a testimony of the growing importance of the National Ecotourism Policy of Sri Lanka (UNWTO, 2002). The main objective of the declaration of International Year of Ecotourism was to identify the conditions of ecotourism of member countries based on six themes, namely national policy, activities and publications, stakeholders' participation and support, awareness raising, regulation, and cooperation.

When the UNWTO commenced the International Year of Ecotourism, there was no national environmental policy in Sri Lanka. Under the influences of the UNWTO, the Sri Lanka government drafted the national ecotourism policy in 2003. Further, some international agencies have contributed to publicizing the tourism attraction of the country. Some tourism agencies and tourists have ranked Sri Lanka at a high rank in their tourism destinations strata. For examples, The New York Times (2010) ranked Sri Lanka at the top of its '31 Places Go in 2010' travel article, and 'The Lonely Planet's Best in Travel 2019' ranked Sri Lanka at the top of the Top Ten Countries to visit in 2019 (Lonelyplanet, 2019).

In addition to that, several non-governmental agencies have supported to implement many community-based ecotourism projects in Sri Lanka. Some of the agencies are Sri Lanka Ecotourism Foundation, Ecotourism Society of Sri Lanka, *Sarvodaya*, Mercy Care, and Care Organization (Wickramasinghe, 2009; Sirisoma, 2012; Kumara, 2016; Aslam and Awang, 2016). The focus of the Sri Lanka Ecotourism Foundation is socio-economic development of rural communities through community-based ecotourism enterprises. The foundation has supported and motivated local communities to participate in community-based ecotourism and environmental conservation projects. The *Sarvodaya* organization aims to empower rural communities through community-based ecotourism while conserving and preserving natural and socio-cultural resources (Aslam and Awang, 2016).

Also, several other independently operating financial organization such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF), as well as international organizations such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the European Union, Australian Aid, International Labour Organization have financially supported to state-centered agencies and non-governmental agencies to implement community-based ecotourism projects in Sri Lanka. As per Kumara (2016, p. 110), IUCN and USAID had financially supported to implement the community-based ecotourism project in Kudawa village. According to Wickramasinghe (2009, p. 20), the Ranpathwila Ecotourism Project has been financially supported by Sri Lanka Australia Natural Resource Management Project while World Conservation Union has financially supported to implement an

ecotourism project in *Illukkumbura* area of Knuckles forest. Some of the projects have promoted the reproduction of mainstream socio-cultural practices while demoting traditional socio-cultural practices. It has created socio-cultural and environmental issues in such destinations. 10

4 Types of ecotourism destinations in Sri Lanka

Different researchers have classified Sri Lanka ecotourism destinations in different ways. Some researchers and institutions, such as SLTB (2003) and Steel *et al.* (1998) have classified ecotourism destinations based on activities (see Table 4). Some researchers, such as Rathnayake and Kasim (2015), Wickramasinghe (2009), have classified ecotourism destinations based on ecotourism stakeholders. Rathnayake and Kasim (2015, p. 23) have identified three types of ecotourism enterprises: private sector investors-launched ecotourism enterprises, resource managing agencies-started ecotourism enterprises, and non-government organizations and community-based organizations initiated ecotourism enterprises.

Table 4. Ecotourism related activities in Sri Lanka

Ecotourism activities	Destinations
Rainforest trekking/ hiking	Knuckles forest (including Meemure), Sinharaja forest (including Kudawa), Peak Wilderness (Randenigala), Sripadaya, Ritigala, Horton Plains, Udawatta Kale
Botanical gardens trekking	Peradeniya, Haggala, Seetawaka
Safari (wild animal watching)	Yala, Uda Walawa, Wasgamuwa, Minneriya, Sigiriya, Hurulu Eco Park (including Eppawala),
Mountain biking	Throughout the island
Birding	Bundala, Kalamatiya, Mutturajawela, Dembara Wewa, Bentota, Sinharaja Forest, Maduru Oya National Park, Pigeon Island, Anawilundawa wet land
Captive wildlife viewing	Elephant sanctuary (Pinnawala), Turtle hatcheries (Kosgoda)
Aboriginals culture experiencing	Dambana (Maduru Oya National Park)
Specific geologic features viewing	Geyser at Kudawella; Hot springs at Kanniya, Mahaoya, Madunagala, World End Horton Plain, and many waterfalls (such as Dunhinda, Diyaluma, St.Clair's falls, Devon, Ramboda, Bambarakanda)
River rafting	Kelaniya, Ambalangoda, Kitulgala
Water sports	Negombo, Bentota
Marine snorkeling and diving	Hikkaduwa, Unawatuna, Tangalle, Bentota, Kirinda (great Bases)
Marine life viewing	Hikkaduwa, Whale-watching at Puttalam and Kalpitiya
Stilt fishing and sport fishing	Negombo, Bentota, Unawatuna, Weligama, Koggala, Kathaluwa, Kalpitiya

Sources: Created based on SLTB (2003), Steele *et al.* (1998), and authors' experiences

Wickramasinghe (2009, p. 20) has also identified three types of ecotourism businesses based on ecotourism project ownership and management. The first is the ecotourism businesses that were initiated by the resource owning state-centered stakeholders (mainly by the Forest Department) and managed by local communities. In most of the cases, the ecotourism projects have been financially assisted by external sources via the Forest Department. According to her, Kudawa, Illukkumbura, and Mutturajawela ecotourism destinations are examples. The second is the community-based ecotourism projects that were promoted and supported by non-governmental organizations. As per Wickramasinghe, the Ranpathwila ecotourism project that is based on the Galkiriyakanda forest reserve is an example. The third is the private entrepreneurs managing ecotourism businesses. She has identified several private sector ecotourism projects in the Sinharaja World Heritage, Knuckles mixed World Heritage and Kanneliya areas. Besides very few cases of successful ecotourism businesses, the local communities and the state-centered stakeholders have criticized many of the private ecotourism projects due to inadequate ecotourism commitments of outside tourism facilitators (Wickramasinghe, 2009, p. 26).

The aforementioned ecotourism classifications have some weaknesses. First, the researchers have ignored one important ecotourism type. It is the ecotourism businesses that were initiated and managed by local communities without external financial support, technical support, and outsiders' tourism plans. Second, some ecotourism destinations have been classified differently by different researchers. For example, Wickramasinghe has classified the Kudawa ecotourism region as a destination that was initiated by the state-centered stakeholders and managed by the local community. Kumara (2016) has identified Kudawa village as a community-based ecotourism destination. However, in Kudawa destination, ecotourism product packaging, pricing, marketing, tour guiding are done by the state-centered stakeholders. Thus, it is essential to re-consider the destination classification.

By considering the strengths and weaknesses of former ecotourism classifications, the study classifies the ecotourism destinations of Sri Lanka into four types, as state-centered stakeholders-initiated ecotourism destinations, outside tourism facilitators-initiated ecotourism destinations, local community-initiated ecotourism destinations, and multiple stakeholders-initiated ecotourism destinations.

4.1 State-centered stakeholders-initiated destinations

State-centered stakeholders-initiated ecotourism destinations include national parks, nature reserves, and sanctuaries. Many of the ecotourism destinations are managed by the resource owning agencies, mainly, the Department of Wildlife Conservation and the Forest Department. The majority of the destinations are located at the periphery of the country. Some of the national parks, such as Maduru Oya, Gal Oya, Wilpattu, and Kumana were closed for a long period during the LTTE civil war (from 1983 to 2008); however, now all have been reopened. In addition to that, the Sri Lanka government has established new ecotourism destinations in the northern and eastern provinces; Mullaitivu and Chundikulam are examples.

As indicated in Table 5, Yala, Uda Walawe, Horton Plains, Bundala, Minneriya, and Kaudulla are most tourist-attracting ecotourism destinations in Sri Lanka. In 2011, the total tourist arrival to the state-centered stakeholders-managed ecotourism destinations was about 0.89 million. In 2017 it was approximately 2.65 million. Thus, it is clear that the demand for ecotourism destinations has increased very rapidly. The economic revenue of the parks has also increased from Rs 392 million in 2011 to Rs 2,712 million in 2017. In addition to that, compared to the Department of Wildlife Conservation-initiated destinations, tourist attraction and the economic contribution of the Forest Department-initiated ecotourism destinations are low.

The dry zone national parks, such as Yala, Minneriya, Wasgamuwa, Udawalawa and Maduru Oya (including the Dambana region) provide opportunities to watch and study Sri Lanka wild animals and archeological monuments (see Table 4). Tourists visit wetlands (such as Kalamatiya), coastal ecosystems (such as Kumana), and some inland forest areas (such as Maduru Oya) for birding. In addition to that, there are two marine national parks (Hikkaduwa and Pigeon Island) that provide opportunities to whaling, dolphin watching, and coral reef watch.

Many of dry zone national parks harbor dangerous animals, such as bears, leopards, and wild elephants. Thus, the destination managing state-centered agencies have prohibited trekking and hiking in many parks. Other than in Horton Plains, where visitors are allowed to walk, tourists should have to hire a jeep (or boat) to take around in national parks. In contrast, visitors are allowed to engage in natural trails, forest trekking, and mountain hiking in the wet zone forest reserves that are managed by the Forest Department. Some of the famous forest trekking and hiking destinations are Udawattha Kale and Kanneliya.

The ecotourism destinations managed by the state-centered stakeholders have a standard pricing system and trained groups of tour guides for facilitating to tourists and implementing the rules and regulations of the state. All national parks and forest reserves keep the same opening hours, daily from 6:30 am to 6:30 pm. The entrance charge per person ranges from US \$12 for less popular parks, US \$15 for Yala and Udawalawa National Parks, and US \$20 for Horton Plains. However, additional charges, such as service charges (US \$8 per group of tourists or vehicle), vehicle charge (US \$3 per vehicle), are levied. Some destinations provide camping opportunities too; yet, with a double charge. Biodiversity conservation regulations, such as Flora and Fauna Conservation Ordinance, are enforced in the destinations for protecting biodiversity and the environment from negative influences of tourists and local people.

It is noteworthy that, although state-centered stakeholders have initiated many ecotourism projects and established few accommodation facilities in many peripheral areas of the country, the agencies do not possess the required resources (such as accommodations, safari jeeps or boats, foods (Wickramasinghe, 2014). As a result, the roles of private stakeholders (especially outside tourism facilitators) have become pivotal.

The state-centered stakeholders have not taken sufficient efforts to get local communities' support in conducting ecotourism businesses too. However, it does not mean that the governmental agencies have never taken any effort to link the local people with the state-centered stakeholders-initiated ecotourism projects. Dambana is one of the examples. Although the ecotourism destination was initiated by the state-centered stakeholders (the Ministry of Culture and Arts, Ministry of Health Nutrition and Uwa Development, the Department of Wildlife Conservation), it has not genuinely supported the local community and tourists. According to Bandara (2009a), Dambana ecotourism has created market economic demand on the aboriginal people's (Vadda) products, such as handicraft, honey, and indigenous medicine. But, those economic activities are not adequately organized and cannot be considered as commercial enterprises. By mentioning the situation of the destination, Bandara (2009a) says that commercialization, demonstration effect, prostitution, destruction of family relationships, begging, and degradation of the environment are becoming prominent in the destination.

Table 5. Tourist arrival volumes and revenues of ecotourism destinations managed by the state-centered stakeholders

Name	Visitor arrivals		Revenue (Million)	
	2011	2017	2011	2017
The Department of Wildlife Conservation-initiated ecotourism destinations				
Yala	315,249	604,706	166.76	889.10
Horton Plains	196,672	435,304	59.07	404.92
Udawalawa	76,925	330,381	36.78	500.00
Minneriya	59,669	198,803	40.46	288.10
Hikkaduwa	51,969	25,778	0.39	0.20
Pigeon Island	35,220	104,659	5.65	58.00
Wilpattu	25,294	70,860	5.19	99.60
Wasgamuwa	19,099	31,609	1.1	11.40
Kumana	17,097	38,745	1.64	22.40
Kaudulla	15,705	230,749	9.75	270.50
Bundala	11,396	22,807	5.57	25.30
Horagolla	4,899	5,488	0.19	0.27
Lunugamwehera	2,730	9,131	0.13	9.80
Gal Oya	1,698	14,951	0.06	10.32
Angammedilla	1,483	3,486	0.05	0.80
Galwaysland	1,221	6,435	0.09	0.81
Lahugala	197	326	0.03	0.80
Maduru Oya	111	3,288	0.01	1.70
Kalawewa National Park		13,415	0	0.20
Kalpitiya		466	0	7.00
ETH-Udawalawa		231,457	0	43.00
Forest Department-initiated ecotourism destinations				
Udawattakele Forest	8,485	25,171	1.48	5.13
Kottawa Forest	388	806	0.13	0.29
Kanneliya Forest	19,587	59,463	0.72	1.95
Makandawa Forest (Kegalle)		2,661	0.00	0.66
Forest Department managing and multiple stakeholders-initiated ecotourism destinations				
Knuckles Forest (Deenston)	1071	6,839	0.08	0.85
Sinharaja Forest (Pitadeniya)	4,606	79293	6.81	1.68
Forest Department managing and outside tourism facilitators-initiated ecotourism destinations				
Eppawala-Hurulu Eco Park	27,411	89,591	50.23	57.64
Grand total	898,182	2,646,668	392.00	2,712.00

Sources: Adapted from Forest Department (2011; 2016), DWC (2017), Senevirathna and Perera (2013, p. 3)

4.2 Outside tourism facilitators-initiated destinations

The growing ecotourism demand and the lack of tourism facilities at the state-centered stakeholders-initiated ecotourism destinations have created demand on outside tourism facilitators-initiated ecotourism projects (Wickramasinghe, 2014). Outside tourism facilitators market the natural attractions near to their resorts and in the state-centered stakeholders-initiated ecotourism destinations. In addition to that, they have initiated new ecotourism destinations; Hurulu Eco Park is an example. Many of the outside tourism facilitators-initiated ecotourism destinations are located in the wet zone and the intermediate zone of Sri Lanka.

Bandara (2009b), Arachchi (2015), and Arachchi *et al.* (2015a; 2015c; 2015d) have identified several ecotourism projects that initiated by outside tourism facilitators. According to Archchi *et al.* (2015a), Sri Lanka ecotourism is trapped by hoteliers that mislead the ecotourism practices; many eco-resorts in Sri Lanka are marketing mass tourism products under the

label of ecotourism and destroying the ecotourism destinations.

Bandara (2009b) has conducted a study for evaluating ecotourism commitments of outside ecotourism operators in Habarana, Sigiriya, Kitulgala, Knuckles, Chilaw, Belihuloya, Ella, Thanamalvila, Yala, and Sinharaja destinations. According to the study, some ecotourism operators are not complying with the fundamentals of ecotourism set by the International Ecotourism Society. Thus, he says that *'although there is a significant potential to develop ecotourism in the island, Sri Lanka has failed to capitalize on this, despite the expansion of the ecotourism industry which has grown in the recent years'* (p. 475). Further, according to him, *'there was no enthusiasm towards practicing ecotourism in its true sense'* and *'there was a lack of understanding about the principles of ecotourism'* (p. 490). By mentioning environmental commitments of operators, he says that although the majority of the ecotourism operators (65% of his sample) have some environmental management programs, none of these initiatives has been structured or included into their plans. Therefore, he has recommended encouraging ecotourism operators to have a vision and structured-plan to manage the environment, to reduce negative impacts, to create facilities for treatment of solid and organic wastes, to promote waste reduction, and to encourage the use of alternative energy sources. For solving the lack of community participation and lack of professionalism in the local community, he has suggested giving necessary education and training to local youths.

As per Arachchi *et al.* (2015d, p. 178) contributing to conserving nature, providing benefits to the local community, focusing natural areas and environmental sustainability are more commonly practicing ecotourism components by the outside ecotourism operators. At the same time, they have identified that some ecotourism operators have ignored some of the core ecotourism components such as responsible marketing, respect to culture, and interpretation (educating activities).

Arachchi *et al.* (2015b) have done a study with the objectives of identifying *'the influences of ecotourism practices of eco-resorts on the ecotourists' satisfaction and their behavioral intention'* and *'assessing the influence of ecotourists' satisfaction on their behavioral intention.'* In the study, they have identified significant positive relationships between the behavioral intention of eco-tourists and five ecotourism components, namely interpretation, sustainability, community involvement, cultural respect, and responsible marketing. Among the five elements, responsible marketing is the most significant ecotourism component that triggers the behavioral intention of the arrival of ecotourists. But, many facilitators have placed less attention on the component. It has severely affected the sustainability of the tourism industry. Therefore they have recommended formulating awareness programs for hoteliers regarding the genuine ecotourism concept and principles.

Wickramasinghe (2009, p. 26) has also identified several ecotourism businesses initiated by outside tourism facilitators in Sinharaja, Knuckles, and Kanneliya forests regions. According to her, except very few successful cases, many of the outside tourism facilitators-initiated ecotourism destinations have been heavily criticized by local communities due to their negative social and environmental impacts. The private ecotourism businesses have equipped with relatively good quality educational facilities and experienced tour guides. But weak socio-cultural commitment has produced conflicts among the local community, state-centered stakeholders and outside tourism facilitators.

4.3 Multiple stakeholders-initiated destinations

The negative and positive socio-cultural, economic, and environmental influences of the state-centered stakeholders-initiated ecotourism projects and the outside tourism facilitators-initiated ecotourism businesses have motivated researchers to introduce multiple stakeholders-initiated ecotourism projects; in the research literature, the ecotourism projects are called as community-based ecotourism projects.

World Tourism Organization (2003) and Wickramasinghe (2009) have said that Mutturajawela wetland sanctuary-based ecotourism businesses have reached the WTO's standards regarding community participation and benefits, stakeholder coordination, environmental concerns, and conservation contribution. According to the study, ecotourism practices of the destination have offered job opportunities to local people and market opportunities for their products. The Mutturajawela Visitor Centre was established under the Wetland Conservation Project of the Central Environmental Authority in 1997. Now it operates independently under the supervision of the Central Environmental Authority. The Mutturajawela Visitor Center has done a crucial role for coordinating and linking various stakeholders including community-based organizations of the area, Sri Lanka Tourism Board, Department of Wildlife Conservation, Central Environmental Authority, tourists and so on. In addition to that, it has contributed environmental conservation through awareness building among various stakeholders on conservation activities and issues in the area and introducing codes of conduct for minimizing adverse environmental consequences. Local facilitators have voluntarily applied specific codes of conduct for reducing negative impact and increasing visitors' satisfaction. Tourists also have concerned about their environmental and economic responsibilities. Thus, the World Tourism Organization has identified the destination as one of the genuine ecotourism destinations (2003).

Fifteen local people of Ambalangoda have initiated the Walawa Jungle River Safari ecotourism project with the support of several NGOs, such as the Sri Lanka Ecotourism Foundation, Mercy Corp, and Care Organization in 2007. The local community has established a community-based organization named Walawa Nadee Ecotourism Association for launching the project. Hambantota District Secretariat and Hambantota District Chamber of Commerce have also provided guidelines and support for implementing the project. The Marcy Corp organization has financially supported for building the pier and the visitor center. In addition to that, it has provided a good number of life jackets and binoculars to the association. The Care Organization (Sri Lanka) has donated outboard boat motors. The ecotourism association has established the Wadurappuwa Biodiversity Conservation Society for ensuring the biodiversity conservation in the area. As a result, the

ecotourism project was awarded in the 5th Annual Sri Lanka Tourism Awards 2011 as the best model community-based tourism project in Sri Lanka (Sirisoma, 2012). 14

However, many researchers have identified the semi-successful or unsuccessful characteristics of the multiple stakeholders-initiated ecotourism projects. For example, Goodwin and Santilli (2009) have identified the failure of community-based tourism projects by evaluating 116 projects all over the world. Among the 116 cases, they have identified only four cases that have economic sustainability. Wickramasinghe (2009), Gurusinghe (2006), Kumara (2016), Sheham (2016), Rathnayake and Kasim (2015) have also identified the weaknesses of this type of ecotourism destinations in Sri Lanka.

As per Sheham (2016, p. 115), except for a few cases, many community-based ecotourism initiatives (multiple stakeholders-initiated ecotourism projects) have failed to deliver and sustain expected benefits consistently. According to Ranasinghe (2009, cited in Sheham, 2016, p. 115), *'Walathwewa community-based ecotourism project was out of operation even before the participatory natural resource management project has been completed.'* President of Sri Lanka Ecotourism Foundation has mentioned the Bundala community-based ecotourism camping project, and Nilwala community-based ecotourism project as failed projects that were initiated by the Sri Lanka Ecotourism Foundation with other stakeholders (Sheham, 2016).

According to Rathnayake and Kasim (2015), the potential access to external resources (mainly funds) for the community-based tourism initiatives has stimulated stakeholder interest and participation to a great extent. However, community-based tourism is challenging since its inception. Ranpathwila ecotourism project is an example. The Forest Department and a group of the local community have initiated the ecotourism project with the support of Sri Lanka Australia Natural Resource Management Project. In 2006, they formed the Ranpathwila Ecotourism Foundation to launch the project. In the beginning, the donor agencies had financially supported them to *'take off'* the businesses, to build up their capacity and skills, to link to relevant agencies such as the Sri Lanka Ecotourism Foundation.

According to Wickramasinghe (2009), the ecotourism project has produced direct economic benefits to 21 households and indirect economic benefits to 57 families. The direct beneficiary households have had shares of the ecotourism business, and they have received profits based on their investments in the ecotourism foundation. In addition to that, 30% of the revenue of the foundation are directly contributed to the Forest Department for enhancing tourism facilities in the destination and for conserving nature. The members of the ecotourism foundation provide tour guide and educational services. Besides the positive benefits, according to Gurusinghe (2006), the ecotourism project is an example of an unsuccessful community-based ecotourism project. According to him, the community has expected immediate financial benefits and has tried to cut down the cost of the tour package at the expense of providing services to the visitors. In addition to that, he has identified the internal disputes and rivalries among the members of the organization as well as with the adjoining villagers. Wickramasinghe (2009) has also identified several constraints of the project, such as the risk of the durability of ecotourism businesses in the absence of the external supports (financial, education, training), social conflicts that were arisen among the villagers in benefit sharing, and the loss of traditional cultural values of the village.

As per Wickramasinghe (2009), the Forest Department has introduced an ecotourism project to the *Illukkumbura* area of Knuckles forest for creating an avenue for compensating forgone economic impacts of the conservation rules. Under the scheme, a community-based organization named *'Dumbara Surakinno'* has been established for conducting ecotourism activities from the community side. The community-based organization and the Forest Department have signed a memorandum of understanding for coordinating the ecotourism activities effectively. About 60% of the ecotourism revenue of the organization has been invested in developing infrastructure in the area while the rest of income has been invested in forest conservation. In the destination, the Forest Department provides accommodation and educational facilities to tourists. As Wickramasinghe's findings, the ecotourism destination suffers from several weaknesses, including a lack of experienced tour guides and good quality accommodations. To solve the shortcomings, she has recommended getting adequate support from the private sector (outside tourism facilitators). However, such kind of intervention would transform the destination towards soft ecotourism.

Kumara (2016) has evaluated the ecotourism activities in Kudawa destination and has emphasized the influences of the socio-cultural, geopolitical context of Kudawa village on ecotourism. According to him, community-based ecotourism is a western concept. Thus, when implementing the concept in the geopolitical, economic, and cultural context of the village, it has faced several challenges. Apart from the Forest Department, Sewalanka Foundation, IUCN, and USAID have financially supported in implementing the project (Kumara, 2016, p. 110). In the beginning, in 1996, the Forest Department had motivated the local community to establish a community-based organization named *'Sinharaja Sumituro'* for launching the project. Thirteen members of the society have been recruited as casual tour guides to the Forest Department. Now, they have been absorbed into the permanent tour guide pool of the department. So, now the CBO is malfunctioning. Also, the ecotourism project has created job opportunities and accommodation business opportunities. At the same time, it has superimposed the western geopolitical, economic, and cultural practices on the existed context. Then, superimposed capitalism has created individualistic and competitive behaviors among the host community members. Those circumstances have undermined the collaborative community approach of the ecotourism project. In addition to that, it has encouraged poaching, bio-piracy, and many other anthropogenic disturbances in the destination. As per him, the influence of *'drug-sex'* tourism, associated with superimposed capitalism, has created the potential for more socio-cultural issues.

Therefore, Rajapakse (2006, p. 19) has drawn *'attention for the pressing need for a change particularly in the present approach of community tourism development with much focus on policy, planning and responsible participation of*

stakeholders in order to establish an environment that is conducive for communities to participate successfully in tourism and benefit from it'.

4.4 Local community-initiated destinations

As explained above, many of the community-based ecotourism projects (multiple stakeholders-initiated ecotourism projects) have several weaknesses. First, the projects depend on external financial and technical supports (Wickramasinghe, 2009). Second, the projects depend on the existing mass tourism market (Rathnayake and Kasim, 2015; Sheham, 2016). Third, the projects suffer from the lack of collaboration among different stakeholders (Sheham 2016; Gurusinghe, 2006; Wickramasinghe, 2009; Kumara 2016). Finally, the projects are negatively affected by the negative attitudes of the host communities (Gurusinghe, 2006).

In contrast, there are some ecotourism destinations with the local community-initiated ecotourism businesses. However, researchers have not placed much attention on studying this type of ecotourism destinations. The Meemure ecotourism destination, located in the Knuckles mixed world heritage forest, is an example. The villagers have initiated ecotourism businesses without outsiders' funds, technical support, and plans. Therefore, in the study, Meemure region was also studied for understanding the ecotourism characteristics of the local community-initiated ecotourism destinations.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Since 1980s Sri Lanka has practiced ecotourism as a method for getting community participation in forest conservation, for collecting funds for forest conservation and local livelihood development in forest areas, and for integrating protected areas to the national economy. For four decades, state-centered stakeholders, local communities, outside tourism facilitators, international agencies, tourists, and researchers (planners) have contributed to evolving the ecotourism activities in the country. It has produced many contributions to socio-economic development and nature conservation. However, various stakeholders have conceived and implemented the ecotourism concept differently. Some researchers have criticized the poor ecotourism commitments of some stakeholders. In addition to that, the state-centered stakeholders and international regulatory agencies have taken some efforts to solve the issue. But, some of the interventions have also negatively affected on some destinations. Based on the stakeholders' involvement, Sri Lanka ecotourism destinations can be classified into four categories: state-centered stakeholders-initiated ecotourism destinations, outside tourism facilitators-initiated ecotourism destinations, local community-initiated ecotourism destinations, and multiple stakeholders-initiated ecotourism destinations.

Sri Lanka state-centered stakeholders have taken many efforts such as commencing ecotourism policy, adjusting protected area conservation regulations for encouraging ecotourism, establishing new institutions for regulating and promoting ecotourism, launching programs for encouraging ecotourism, facilitating national and international agencies to initiate ecotourism projects. In some forest areas, the state-centered stakeholders have launched ecotourism businesses too. At the same time, the eradication of LTTE terrorism has also created a favorable environment for ecotourism development in the country. Thereby, the tourist arrivals to the country have gradually increased since 2008. The number of tourists visiting the country rose from 447,890 to 2,333,796 within the last decade (2009 to 2018). However, some of the efforts have been criticized by researchers due to inadequate ecotourism commitments, including irresponsible marketing, poor facilitation, and lack of local participation and educational programs.

Concurrently, the outside tourism facilitators have involved in ecotourism businesses as accommodation providers, transport service providers, tour guides, and so on. However, the majority of the outsider tourism facilitators-initiated ecotourism destinations have been criticized due to negative socio-economic, cultural, environmental influences. Some researchers, such as Wickramasinghe (2009), have recommended getting the support of outside tourism facilitators to launching ecotourism projects. Some researchers have identified poor ecotourism commitment of tourists as the leading cause for the defective ecotourism characteristics of destinations. According to some researchers, not only tourists' but also tourism facilitators' irresponsible behaviors have negatively affected on ecotourism destinations; as per them, mass tourism products are marketed under the label of ecotourism. Thus, state-centered stakeholders and international agencies have intervened for regulating ecotourism activities. However, in some destinations, the interventions have also caused to loss of socio-cultural and environmental resources of destinations. Thereby, attainment of nature conservation and rural development objectives through ecotourism has become a challenging task to the state agencies.

Considering the strengths and weaknesses of the state-centered stakeholders-initiated ecotourism destinations and the outside tourism facilitators-initiated ecotourism destinations, the state-centered stakeholders and international regulatory agencies have moved towards to initiate ecotourism projects with multiple stakeholders, including local communities. The ecotourism projects have been planned, funded, and implemented by the state-centered stakeholders, national and international agencies, and outside tourism facilitators. Although there are some positive influences, researchers have criticized the ecotourism projects due to socio-cultural and environmental issues developed under the weaknesses of the initiatives.

The fourth ecotourism destination type introduced by the study is the local communities-initiated ecotourism destinations. However, researchers have not paid sufficient attention to studying this type of ecotourism destinations. Thus, it is essential to examine the ecotourism characteristics of the local community-initiated ecotourism destination. One of the key characteristics of the ecotourism destinations is that the local communities have launched ecotourism businesses without outsiders' plans and funds.

Also, the ecotourism destinations that initiated by the state-centered stakeholders, outside tourism facilitators and multiple stakeholders have achieved some objectives of genuine ecotourism. Thus, ecotourism destinations cannot be considered as 100% failed destinations or entirely mass tourism destination. In other words, although the intentional or unintentional irresponsible behaviors of some stakeholders in some destinations have produced negative impacts, the responsible behaviors of some stakeholders have contributed to ensuring some characteristics of the genuine ecotourism. Therefore, all stakeholders including researchers, planners, state agencies, private tourism facilitators, local communities, as well as tourists should pay attention to implement all basic principles of ecotourism, to evaluate the role of each stakeholder in structuring the characteristics of destinations, and to identify the geographic causes behind the spatial variation of the successfulness (or failure) of ecotourism destinations in Sri Lanka.

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