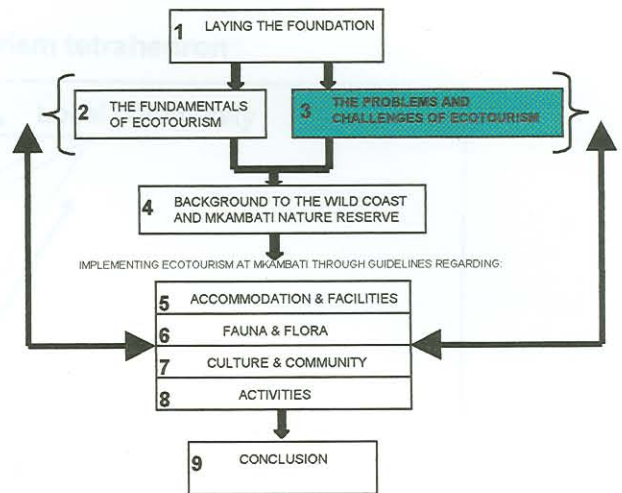


## Chapter 3

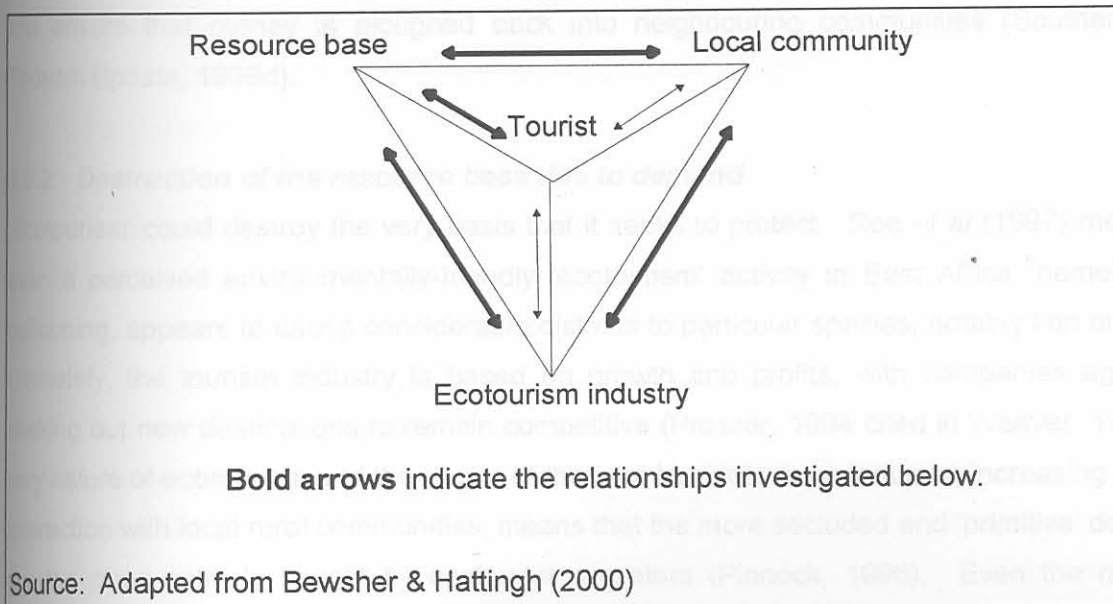
# The problems and challenges of ecotourism

### 3.1 Introduction

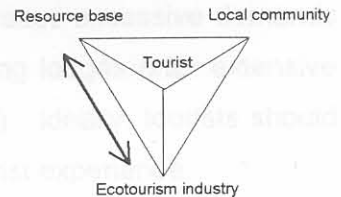


Ecotourism is proclaimed as a mode of eco-development which represents a practical and effective means of attaining social, economic, and environmental improvement for countries (Ceballos-Lascuráin, 1991 cited in Brandon, 1993). These concepts recur frequently in literature, but are often rhetoric rather than practice, with 'ecotourism' sometimes leading to numerous problems, instead of providing the intended benefits (Brandon, 1993). This is because the fundamentals of ecotourism are not being incorporated into its conception, development, operation, or marketing (Wight, 1995). In an attempt to minimise these problems, the definition of ecotourism used in this study is narrower than the definition of nature-based tourism with specific measurable fundamentals which are clearly set out in the ecotourism tetrahedron (Figure 1.2). It comprises the ecotourism industry, tourists, local community, and resource base (natural and cultural environments). This chapter identifies problems that emanate from the **relationships** between the components of the tetrahedron, indicated by the arrows in Figure 3.1. Four of these relationships, shown with the bold arrows, are described in this chapter. These four have been chosen, because it was determined from the literature study that they are the areas of chief concern. As in Chapter 2, various examples are used to illustrate the discussion – some of these examples highlight the problems, while others demonstrate possible solutions. Although ecotourism will seldom contain all the elements of the ecotourism tetrahedron in perfect equilibrium, one can still strive towards achieving the ideal, which is to be as far to the right as possible in the continuums of Figure 2.3.

Figure 3.1 The relationships within the ecotourism tetrahedron



## 3.2 The resource base and the ecotourism industry



This first relationship investigated is the one between the resource base and the ecotourism industry, which entails some of the most significant and identifiable problems, in particular **ecological damage** and **environmental degradation** (Boo, 1991; Ceballos-Lascuráin, 1991; and West & Brechin, 1991, all cited in Brandon, 1993). This is partly due to the following:

### 3.2.1 Eco-sell

Addison (1997) refers to eco-sell as 'greenwashing' of products. It has also been termed 'eco-exploitation' (Wight, 1993), 'light-green' (Plant, 1991 cited in Wight, 1993) and 'environmental whoring' (De Mooij, 1994 cited in Litvin, 1996).

Many 'ecotourist' operators label their products as ecotourism merely because 'green' sells (Dowling, 1999; Wight, 1993). These products, however, may not adhere to the components of ecotourism (Horwich *et al*, 1993) and often misrepresent and dilute the concept (Malloy & Fennell, 1998). Despite increasing awareness, there is still a general lack of understanding of ecotourism in the travel industry, amongst most tourists, and within society in general (Lew, 1998). Colin Bell from the South African company, Wilderness Safaris, reports that ecotourism is seldom practiced in accordance with its true definition, and that people need to be made aware that it involves far more than taking tourists to a national park in a minibus. Wilderness Safaris is active in direct



shareholder involvement and local upliftment and education. They adopt a long-term approach and ensure that money is ploughed back into neighbouring communities (Southern African Tourism Update, 1999d).

### 3.2.2 Destruction of the resource base due to demand

'Ecotourism' could destroy the very basis that it seeks to protect. Roe *et al* (1997) mention that even a perceived environmentally-friendly 'ecotourism' activity in East Africa, namely, hot air ballooning, appears to cause considerable distress to particular species, notably lion and buffalo. Ultimately, the tourism industry is based on growth and profits, with companies aggressively seeking out new destinations to remain competitive (Prosser, 1994 cited in Weaver, 1998). The very nature of ecotourism and the desire of the new tourist to experience an increasing amount of interaction with local rural communities, means that the more secluded and 'primitive' destinations are the ones actively sought by ecotourist operators (Pinnock, 1996). Even the most basic services and infrastructure required can place pressure on the environment. Furthermore, some tourists engaging in ecotourism demand a high level of luxury, which places excessive demands on the resource base. In the Nepalese Himalaya, for example, trekking lodges offer extensive menus which create excessive need for scarce wood fuel (Cater, 1994). Ideally, tourists should consume local foods which are readily available and also add to the tourist experience.

Potential destruction of the resource base due to demand is an area of current concern. The United Nations has proclaimed 2002 as the 'International Year of Ecotourism'. This may encourage numerous tourists who usually engage in conventional tourism to seek out ecotourist destinations, and could result in remote, relatively unspoiled destinations being exploited. Concern is also being expressed that local communities will not be sufficiently involved<sup>3</sup>.

As ecotourism expands in South Africa and previously secluded areas become more popular, planning, monitoring, and auditing must be done to ensure that the resources which are attracting tourists in the first place are sustainably maintained.

An example where the environment was damaged due to the influence of outsiders relates to the Community Baboon Sanctuary in Belize. Under the Belize Audubon Society, park development and conservation have been integrated with local economic development by promoting local trail guides, bed-and-breakfast establishments run by locals, and local craft industries. The Community Baboon Sanctuary, for example, which began in 1985 to protect the black howler monkey, *Alouatta pigra*, operates on land owned by numerous different landowners who have all

3. Electronic communication with Mr. N. De Villiers, Open Africa Initiative, 20 November 2000.

preserved tracts of forest for these monkeys and benefit from having part of the sanctuary on their land. This is a good example of community involvement and also illustrates that one does not need pristine environment for such projects (Horwich *et al*, 1993). The problem began in 1988 when American guided tour groups streamed into the area. Tour leaders frequently circumvented local guides and took tourists through the forest trails themselves, thus removing control from the locals. Since these trails are on private land, this caused damage to crops and reduced wildlife populations. It also mitigated against tourist revenues contributing to conservation in the area and reaching local guides (Horwich *et al*, 1993).

In some cases, tour operators contribute to the maintenance of tracks, campsites, etc., causing them to care more actively for the resource. Active participation in the conservation of resources creates better understanding between the land managers and tour operators, whose aims are sometimes conflicting (Beeton, 1998; Boo, 1990). Beeton also suggests that tour operators form partnerships with locals and develop codes of practice and other programmes, benefiting both the environment and local community. An example of tourists and the ecotourism industry contributing to community upliftment is that of ConsCorp's Rural Investment Fund (introduced in Section 2.3) which has funded schools, clinics, a charcoal producing project for locals, and other small business initiatives (Conservation Corporation Africa, 1997). However, such spin-offs do not necessarily imply active participation of local people in ecotourism operations.

Paradoxically, smaller companies often contribute more than large companies. For example, a tour operator in Costa Rica, Victor Emmanuel, donated US\$ 500 per tourist to help purchase threatened rainforest (Boo, 1990). Tourists too, can be so enthused by their experience that they contribute personally to conservation (Boo, 1990) and community upliftment programmes. Victor Emmanuel encourages his tourists to make a pledge for every bird seen on a particular trip. In so doing, he raised US\$ 16 000 (Boo, 1990).

Locals, tourists, and the industry need to actively endorse ecotourism regulations if the environment is to be protected. At Cod Hole diving site on the Great Barrier Reef, for example, tour operators need a permit to operate in the area, but in the past their behaviour was not restricted. 'People pressure' increased, and ecosystem changes occurred, such as an increasing population of small predatory fish. Moray eels also began competing for food handouts. In 1992 the tour operators and management staff formed an association to develop management objectives and a code of conduct for the area. The code related to mooring use and anchoring, fish feeding, diving behaviour, scheduling of visits, etc. Operators adopted it enthusiastically



because it was a form of self-regulation and not imposed 'from above'. This has contributed to the long-term sustainability of the area and improved the visitor's experience (Beeton, 1998).

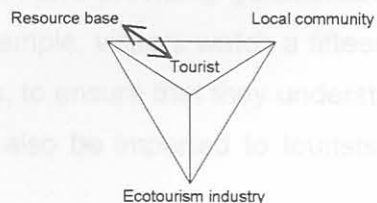
### 3.2.3 Lack of common vision

For ecotourism to succeed, a common vision is needed amongst all stakeholders, with each understanding and adhering to the philosophy and approach of ecotourism. Although there are examples of ecotourism that involve all four aspects of the tetrahedron, there are many 'jumping on the bandwagon' of ecotourism and not adhering to sustainable practices. This ties in with the problem of lack of attention to **long-term sustainability**. Weaver (1998) warns that any insistence that ecotourism does not negatively affect the environment or host society is restrictive, since a particular action or development may have long term negative consequences which are not initially realised. Practices that seem sustainable in the short term may not be so in the long-term. This is particularly due to the lack of effective sustainability indicators. Even the most environmentally sensitive tourists traveling to distant places will contribute implicitly to ozone depletion and other environmental problems, because they travel by air.

### 3.2.4 Monitoring and auditing

The ecotourism industry, tourists, and local communities must all avoid practices with negative impacts. This requires continual monitoring and auditing, and readjustments to practice and/or behaviour if necessary. Driver *et al* (1987), Graefe *et al* (1990) and Stankey *et al* (1985) all cited in Wallace (1993) believe that monitoring should assess the positive and negative impacts on the biophysical environment and on the experience of the visitor. It should be an ongoing and participatory process, involving local communities and providing short-term as well as long-term benefits. With a history of bad relationships between conservation officials and local communities in South Africa, all parties should work hard at creating trust. Part of this is providing clear benefits towards the beginning of a project.

## 3.3 The tourists and the resource base



The main problem identified in the relationship shown above between the tourists and the resource base, is that of **minimal meaningful and interpretive education for tourists and lack of interaction and participation at the destination**. As mentioned in Section 2.4, enlightenment of the tourists is vital. Many tourists engaging in ecotourism are environmentally responsible people, but may still need to be informed by the ecotourism industry (tour operators,

guides, etc.) on how to behave in certain settings. This is often the missing factor in ecotourism. Even where the industry is fully playing its part in conserving the environment - if this is not conveyed to the tourist much damage can be done. Furthermore, the lack of enlightenment and interaction will detract from the tourist's experience.

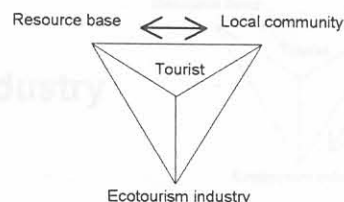
Rocktail Bay Lodge in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, belonging to Wilderness Safaris, has set an example in helping to fund the turtle tagging programme of the Natal Provincial Conservation Services. Wilderness Safaris pay the salaries of the park scouts who protect the turtles during the breeding season. They patrol the beach, count the eggs, and tag the mother before she returns to the sea. Guests staying at the lodge are allowed to accompany the park scouts (Bayman, 1998). Guests are therefore able to experience the turtles within a controlled and informative environment. More programmes such as this are needed. An urgent plea was sent out during 1999 to the South African industry to protect the marine resources that are open to uncontrolled exploitation, much of it in the name of ecotourism. Examples are whale watching, turtle watching (and even riding), and snorkeling with dolphins. The animals, and the consequences of irresponsible behaviour should be understood before tourists attempt any of these activities. For example, dolphins have been seen with propeller cuts caused by ski boats which tried to contain them, and turtles (who have no eyelids) have been blinded due to their corneas being cracked by photographer's strobe lights<sup>4</sup>.

Tourists also need to understand that animals should be seen in their natural environment and in chance encounters. Guides often promise their guests certain sightings, and in order to deliver, they may attract animals by feeding them or throwing stones at birds' nests to force them to emerge. Tourists and guides alike need to be educated on these matters. In Australia, tourists may seek to cuddle a koala bear, with some viewing this as true ecotourism due to the direct interaction with wildlife. According to Beeton (1998), however, this causes stress to the animals. Further focus needs to be placed on enlightening the tourist and providing guidelines/codes of conduct. Prior to entry into Galápagos National Park, for example, visitors watch a fifteen-minute video on low-impact techniques and backcountry regulations, to ensure that they understand how to behave (Wallace, 1993). Similar enlightenment should also be imparted to tourists prior to interacting with local communities.

4. Electronic communication with Mr. A. Cobb, Natal Sharks Board, 19 July 1999.



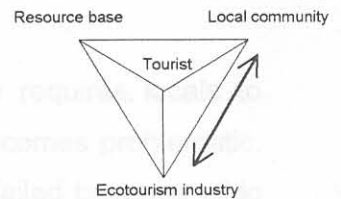
### 3.4 The resource base and the local community



Brandon (1993) points out that there are few examples of tourism ventures that have successfully pursued the **dual goals of community development and environmental protection**. Ecotourism is often promoted as the means of achieving this, but, according to the definition used in this study, it has frequently failed. This is the major issue at stake in the relationship between the resource base and the local community.

It is ironic that, in numerous cases, the local community and the resource base have a very successful relationship until outsiders interfere. The author could find no references to problems in the relationship between the environment and the local community prior to external interference. Beeton (1998) writes that indigenous communities often have a close relationship with the land and a long-term approach to its management. Their burning policies, consumptive utilisation of wildlife, agricultural systems, etc. have often been passed down over the generations and are fully sustainable. For example, Maasai in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA), Tanzania have burned the land for decades to prevent the growth of grass types unsuitable for grazing. Burning was banned once the NCA was established, and since then, the number of cattle has declined (Sikar, 1996).

Once there is interference, even in the form of well-meant ecotourism ventures, there may be stress on resources that could cause social conflict. Beeton (1998) describes how the need for additional, or a different type of, sewage and waste treatment, litter control, and the alteration of scenic attributes, can create resentment towards tourists and operators. Locals are sensitive to land degradation from both a practical and spiritual aspect. Returning to the example of the NCA, cultivation has also been prohibited, and the grazing areas for cattle have been drastically reduced since the Serengeti National Park and the NCA were proclaimed. These two factors as well as the ban on burning have seriously impeded the survival of the Maasai, and caused major conflicts (Sikar, 1996; Wambui, 1996).



### 3.5 The local community and the ecotourism industry

When examining the relationship between the local community and the ecotourism industry, Boo (1991), Ceballos-Lascuráin (1991), and West & Brechin (1991) all cited in Brandon (1993) identify **negative impact on local culture** and the **creation of local economic hardships** as the most significant problems. This can be caused by the following:

#### 3.5.1 Revenue leakage

A recent World Bank study revealed that only 45% of tourist expenditure remains in developing countries, and the figure is often much lower (Pinnock, 1996). Revenue leakage is a problem that impacts on local communities, primarily caused by the ecotourism industry (Weaver, 1998). Although ecotourism emphasises the consumption of local goods and services (Weaver, 1998), and the provision of benefits to members of local communities (Boo, 1990), revenue leakage still occurs because some goods and services must be imported, for example, petrol, some food, certain furnishings, equipment to build roads, etc. (Boo, 1990; Weaver, 1998).

Ecotourism should use as many local people, products, and materials as possible to minimise leakage. At Makalali Resource Reserve in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa, for example, local Shangaan and Pedi people were trained on site. The architect used 3-dimensional plans which they could understand, and even incorporated the ideas of locals into the design, allowing them the freedom to experiment with their own skills. The design elements and architectural details were copied from surrounding communities. Furniture was made on site, using timber from the bush-clearing programme, and many of the materials were obtained locally (EPM, 1995).

#### 3.5.2 Low-level involvement of the local community

If ecotourism is correctly implemented, communities should be involved in the planning stages right from the outset. Brandon (1993) and Koch (1998) emphasise that communities should decide on the type of growth they would like to see, and the ecotourism industry should then help them implement those plans. Pederson (1991) supports this, warning that it can be difficult to funnel economic benefits to local communities, and that in order to maximise benefits, planners must first concentrate on activities that utilize the skills and resources already possessed by communities. For example, ecotourism projects in Talamanca, Costa Rica have been developed solely by the local community, and adhere closely to the definition of ecotourism used in this study in their operations. An example of how they use existing ability amongst locals is that they assist local cooks in setting up their own businesses, and urge tourists and tour operators to



patronize these establishments (Salazar *et al*, 1991). When the industry requires locals to perform tasks in which they have no experience, community involvement becomes problematic. In Mexico, for example, a cooperatively owned and run ejido hotel project failed because ejido members lacked training in the necessary administration skills needed to run the business effectively (Pederson & Ceballos Lascuráin, 1990 cited in Pederson, 1991). McKercher (1998) and McKercher & Robbins (1998) cited in Dowling (1999) mention that Australian ecotourism businesses generally do not have the skills required to run successful operations, and that they need multi-skilled employees with appropriate personal qualities, as well as business planning and management skills. This constraint often drives the industry to using outsiders rather than training and equipping locals.

In Section 2.3 it was mentioned that locals should have a degree of control and ownership. Pinnock (1996:159) refers to 'power relationships', saying that if the balance of power between the industry and local communities is wrong at the ground level, then "*ecotourism will be no different in its effect from Third World copper or coal mining: the locals have it and work it for the foreigners who use it and get rich*". Kahn (1996 cited in Pinnock, 1996:159) reports that "*there are few successful ecotourist ventures which involve indigenous Southern African people on a basis of an equal partnership*". One aspect of this unequal partnership which is becoming increasingly publicised is the issue of intellectual property rights. An example of a community with little ownership is that of the Monarch Butterfly Overwintering Reserves in Mexico, where locals were viewed as beneficiaries, having no involvement in the project design, and certainly feeling no ownership over it. Furthermore, locals believed that the high tourism numbers and the existence of the reserve had resulted in numerous negative impacts. The men involved in the project served as guides and the women sold food – activities that do not require long-term investment, resulting in few people becoming stakeholders. Local people were also asked to plant trees and were paid with food handouts. It is not surprising then that few of the trees were maintained, once planted, because the locals had no sense of ownership over them (Brandon, 1993).

### 3.5.3 *Commodization of culture and the demonstration effect*

Beeton (1998) writes that tourism can have negative impacts on indigenous cultures. This has even occurred in some ecotourism cases. If culture becomes a commodity, it can lose some of its original value, and become sanitised and generalised. Pinnock (1996) refers to 'cultural warping' while Taylor (1995) uses the term 'community show' where locals may 'act' according to the expectations of the tourists, and in so doing, not reflect their true culture. Beeton (1998) uses the example of visitors expecting to see Aborigines playing the didgeridoo, even though it is not a

traditional instrument in the southern areas. However, due to tourist demand, few ventures in southern Australia do not incorporate the playing of didgeridoos and sell the instruments.

When offering culture to a tourist, the stress should be on diversity and change rather than static and simplistic notions about culture. This is classically represented by the story of a taxi driver who picked up a wealthy American tourist at Johannesburg International Airport. The American said: *"I'd like to see some Zulu's"*. *"I am one"*, replied the taxi driver. *"I mean a real one"*, responded the American (Koch, 1998:72). This has been one of the criticisms of Kagga Kamma Game Reserve (mentioned in Section 2.4) where visitors can see the last surviving Bushmen living in a supposedly authentic way. However, out of sight, they wear ordinary clothes, buy food from shops, and send their children to a conventional school (Pinnock, 1996). However, Southern African Tourism Update (1999e) claims that the media crying 'exploitation' are misguided. One of the Bushmen, David Kruiper, says: *"We are very happy here. This is as close to our traditional existence as we can hope for in a modern world"* (Southern African Tourism Update, 1999d:15). It has also been cited as one of the region's finest examples of ecotourism (Southern African Tourism Update, 1998a). It has already been mentioned that the community must choose what they would like to present to visitors. It does seem, in the case of Kagga Kamma, that the local communities are benefiting and are in control of what they offer. This is demonstrated by the fact that, being nomadic, they come and go as they please (Southern African Tourism Update, 1998a). However, these issues are complex and there is seldom a clear answer. One could criticise the 'community show' on the one hand, but have to admit, on the other hand, that it is enabling the Bushmen to retain their culture and experience pride in it.

## Conclusion

It frequently occurs, when two cultures come together, even within an environment of mutual exchange and benefit, that the one can dominate the other. The tourist's holiday culture, disposable cash, etc. may cause false expectations and demands, and leave the community desiring a similar lifestyle (Beeton, 1998). This is the 'demonstration effect'. According to Gartner (1996), this phenomenon raises concerns and can eventually result in resentment in host communities. In Isinamva, South Africa, locals have decided to limit the number of tour groups because they fear that their children will mimic the European way of life instead of respecting their own (Koch, 1998). Since many people engaging in ecotourism seek direct meaningful interaction with local communities, this may cause an invasion of the local community's privacy. This goes beyond the privacy they would need in their own homes, often extending to religious/sacred sites and rituals which locals would prefer to keep private. The Cofan Indians in the Cuyabeno Reserve in Amazonian Ecuador house their tourists in rustic wooden cabins which they have built



1.6 km down river from their village, so as to avoid visitors encroaching on their privacy (Ceballos-Lascuráin cited in Van der Merwe, 1995).

### 3.5.4 *Lack of linkage between conservation and broad-based development*

This problem was already mentioned in Section 3.4, but also applies to the relationship between the local community and the ecotourism industry. Ecotourism has often managed to bring about conservation, but the development of local communities and their area has left much to be desired.

Brandon (1993), however, makes a key point that ecotourism will only promote conservation if locals can clearly link the benefit they receive to the protection of the resource base. The most ideal example here is the CAMPFIRE programme, where locals have distinctly recognized that conserving the wildlife brings revenue from hunters and substantially improves their standard of living (Pinnock, 1996). Unfortunately, not all are success stories.

Ecotourism should result in broad-based development. However, this is not always the case. Brandon (1993) and Bunting *et al* cited in Brandon (1993) propose two reasons for this. First, there is an absence of political will and commitment on the part of governments to mobilize resources that will ensure the integration of ecological principles with development. Second, tourism is often promoted by large-scale external parties, resulting in lack of benefits to locals and leading to increased revenue leakage

## 3.6 Conclusion

This section has focussed on the problems and challenges within the relationships of the ecotourism tetrahedron. Each of these needs to be addressed in order for ecotourism to succeed and become a tourism niche in its own right.

If all stakeholders in the ecotourism tetrahedron could have a common philosophy and vision, adhering to the four fundamentals, most of the problems identified could be solved. Good planning and monitoring are also crucial elements of the solution. The problems identified in this chapter are listed in Table 3.1. This summary is reproduced in Table 9.2 where the problems and challenges applicable to Mkambati Nature Reserve are indicated. In Chapters 5 to 8, guidelines are proposed which aim to ameliorate these problems. Section 9.2 describes the relevant problems and where possible, indicates how the guidelines aim to solve them.

Table 3.1 Summary of the problems and challenges of ecotourism

PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN:			
RESOURCE BASE & ECOTOURISM INDUSTRY	TOURISTS & RESOURCE BASE	RESOURCE BASE & LOCAL COMMUNITY	LOCAL COMMUNITY & ECOTOURISM INDUSTRY
Eco-sell.	Lack of interpretation.	Community development & environmental protection not pursued simultaneously.	Revenue leakage.
Destruction of resource base due to demand.	Lack of interaction & participation.		Low-level involvement of local community.
Lack of common vision.			Commodification of culture & demonstration effect.
Lack of attention to long-term sustainability.			
Monitoring & auditing.			Lack of linkage between conservation & broad-based development.