

Ecotourism over the years

Concepts, discussions,
and key players

June 3rd, 2025



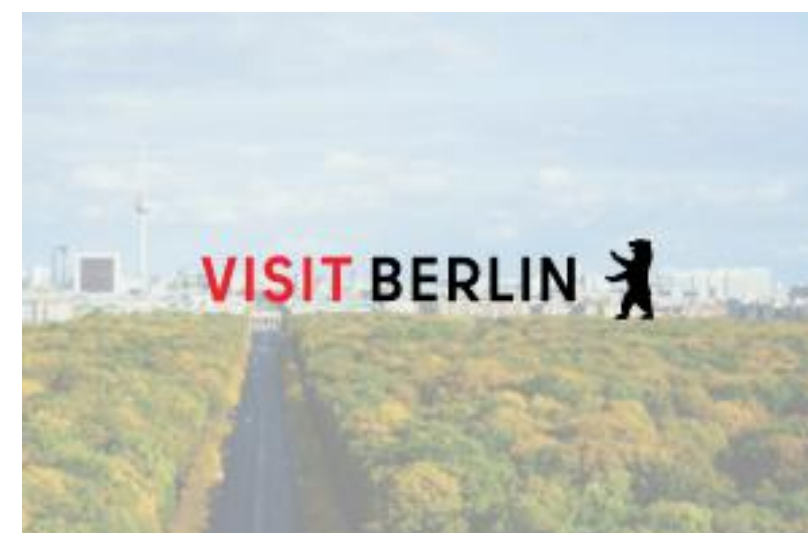
ABOUT



Ayako Ezaki

**Managing Partner,
TrainingAid**

Sustainable Tourism Development | Consulting | Training



Evolving Voices and Views on Ecotourism



01

EARLIER DAYS OF ECOTOURISM

02

**ECOTOURISM SOCIETY (LATER
TIES) & ITS KEY CONTRIBUTIONS**

03

**CHALLENGES & EMERGING
DISCUSSIONS**

04

AND WHERE TO FROM HERE?

A person with blonde hair in a ponytail, wearing a light-colored long-sleeved shirt, dark pants, and a backpack, stands in a lush forest. Their arms are outstretched horizontally, touching the moss-covered bark of a large tree trunk. The forest floor is covered in ferns and fallen branches. The background shows more trees and a misty atmosphere. The entire image has a blue tint.

01.

EARLIER DAYS OF ECOTOURISM

Working towards a common
understanding

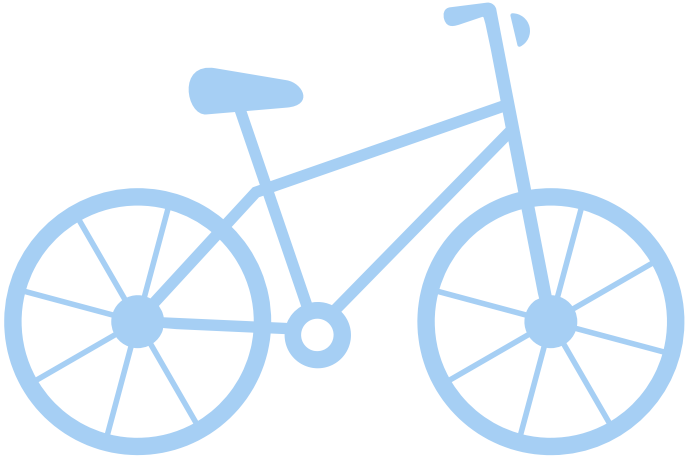
Initiatives around Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism



Sustain Tourism Stewardship Council (STSC)

- Accreditation body by UNWTO, UNEP, TIES, Rainforest Alliance, etc
- ☹ only regional network setup
- High operational costs
- High fee for accreditation status

 Rainforest Alliance



Mohonk Agreement
Proposal for an International **Certification Program** for Sustainable Tourism and Ecotourism
2000

Year of Ecotourism
UN-declared **international year (IYE)** > guidelines and methodologies for ecotourism development
2002

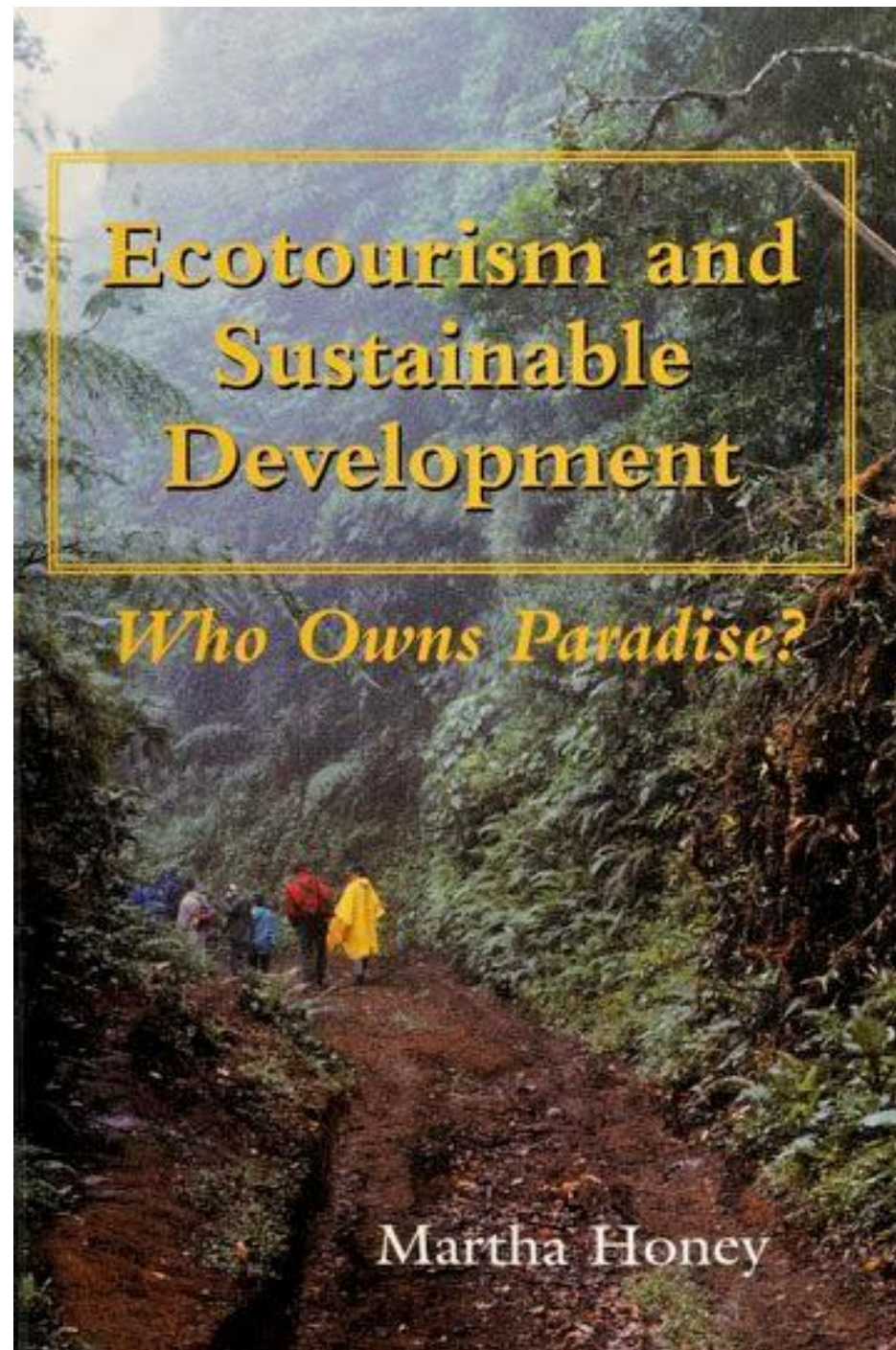
IYE+5
Global conference > **Oslo Statement on Ecotourism** (status quo, development and recommendations)
2007

Global Criteria
Partnership for **Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria**, led by UN organisations and NGOs.
2007

STSC
Sustainable Tourism **Stewardship Council** for regional certification networks
2009

GSTC
The Global **Sustainable Tourism Council** (GSTC)
2010

Ecotourism and Sustainable Development



(1999)

Visions reflecting specific experiences



Just about nature?

“responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment **and sustains the well-being of the local people**”



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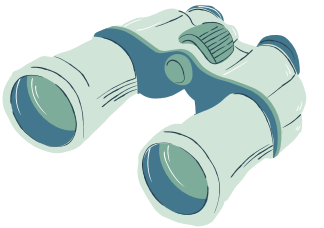


- It's (of course) also about people.
- But who's conserving what, from whose perspectives?



UN Tourism: Main Characteristics of Ecotourism

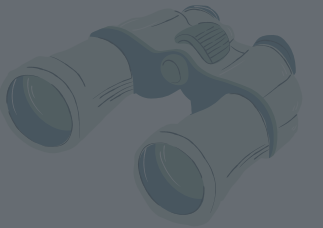
1. All nature-based forms of tourism in which the **main motivation** of the tourists is the observation and appreciation of nature as well as the traditional cultures prevailing in natural areas.
2. It contains **educational and interpretation** features.
3. It is generally, but not exclusively organised by specialised tour operators for **small groups**.
Service provider partners at the destinations tend to be **small, locally owned businesses**.
4. It **minimises negative impacts** upon the natural and socio-cultural environment.
5. It supports the maintenance of natural areas which are used as ecotourism attractions by:
 - Generating **economic benefits** for host communities, organisations and authorities managing natural areas with conservation purposes;
 - Providing alternative employment and income **opportunities for local communities**;
 - **Increasing awareness** towards the conservation of natural and cultural assets, both among locals and tourists.



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What else should be
added to this
description?



ECOTOURISM SOCIETY (LATER TIES) & ITS KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

02.

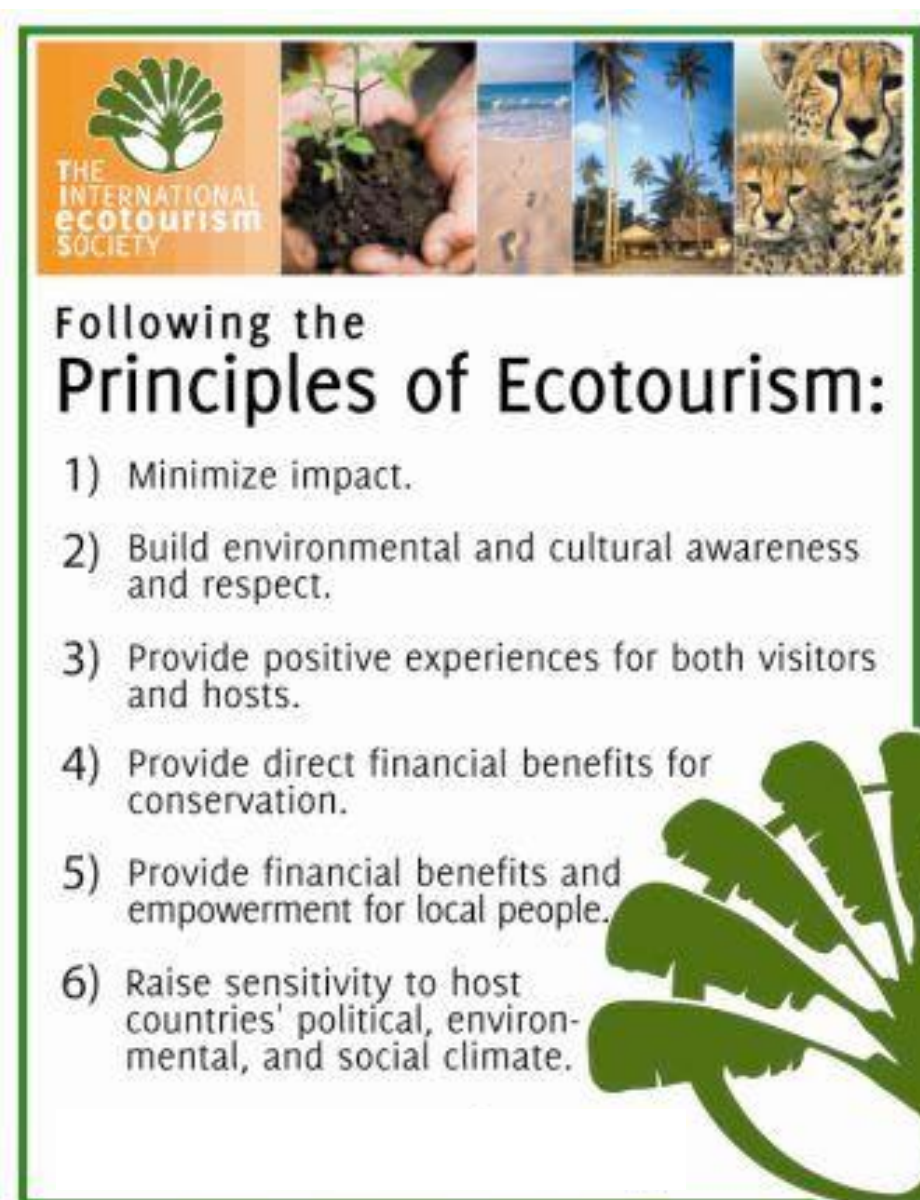
Reflecting on the legacy, a decade on



Ecotourism Society

The definition & principles:

a framework for discussing the concept
in a concrete way



"Association of associations"

National ecotourism associations around the world
(around 2005 - 2010)



National ecotourism certification programs



Ecotourism Kenya

[Ecorating Certification](#)



Botswana Tourism

[Botswana Ecotourism Certification System](#)



Ecotourism Australia

[ECO Certification](#)



Swedish Nature & Ecotourism Association
(Naturturismföretagen)

[Nature's Best](#)

National ecotourism certification programs



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Nature's Best



- Are **local and regional programs** more credible and trustworthy than international certification programs?
- How important are **locally specific contexts** in standardized approaches to sustainability?

From an international society to regional networks



AEN



EEN



LACEN



globalecotourismnetwork.org/where-we-are/

GEN: Definition and Key Concepts

Our definition

“ **Ecotourism** is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and creates knowledge and understanding through interpretation and education of all involved: visitors, staff and the visited”

<Global Ecotourism Network, 2016>

Authentic ecotourism principles including:

- Deliver **memorable interpretative experiences** to visitors.
- Help raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climate.
- Minimize **physical, social, behavioral and psychological impacts** on fauna and flora.
- Recognize the rights and **spiritual beliefs of indigenous and local peoples**.

GEN:

“Ecotourism should be **non-consumptive** in relation to nature”.



03.



CHALLENGES & EMERGING DISCUSSIONS

Disclaimer

These are my personal views only, based on my experiences.

Challenges with the International Society model

- US and "Western" focused perspective.
- Lack of clarity in how it specifically addressed industry needs.
- Lack of clarity in how exactly it filled the niche, as the industry evolved.

Challenges with the Global / Regional Networks model

- Not enough shared understanding / acceptance of the context in which change took place.
- Not enough adjustment to reflect new realities of the markets.
- De-centralized model - both a strength and a weakness.
- Lack of "brand power".

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Is ecotourism (as a conceptual framework, or as a "movement") still relevant? How and to whom?

Is ecotourism still relevant?



- Some (old and new) organizations are carrying forward some aspects of the concept / principles of ecotourism.
- Most without specific emphasis on “ecotourism” but focused more broadly on sustainability.
- Reflecting the more wild-spread recognition of the importance of the “people pillar” and the interconnected nature of different aspects of sustainability priorities.

A person wearing a grey knit beanie and a dark blue puffer jacket with a backpack is seen from behind, looking out over a vast, open landscape. The sky is filled with numerous hot air balloons of various colors, suggesting a sunrise or sunset scene. The overall image has a blue tint.

04.

AND WHERE TO
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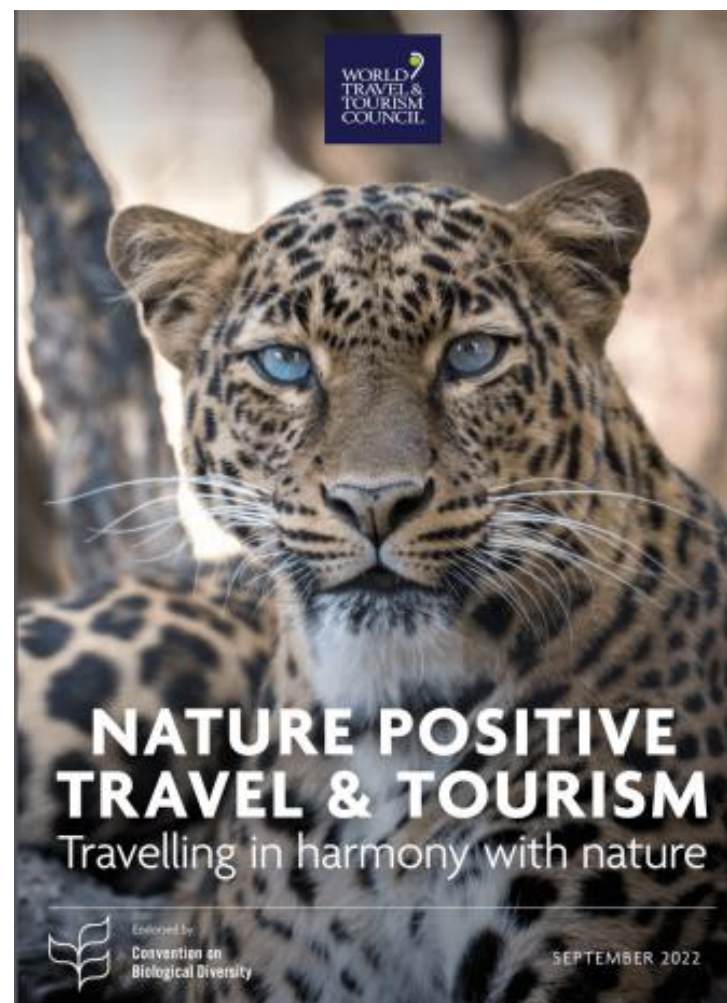


Is the difference between
sustainable tourism and
regenerative tourism
ecotourism?

Nature-Positive Tourism

Nature Positive:
“describing a world where nature is being restored and is regenerating, rather than declining”

Jones P. (2024), “Nature Positive Tourism”, Athens Journal of Tourism 11: 1-14

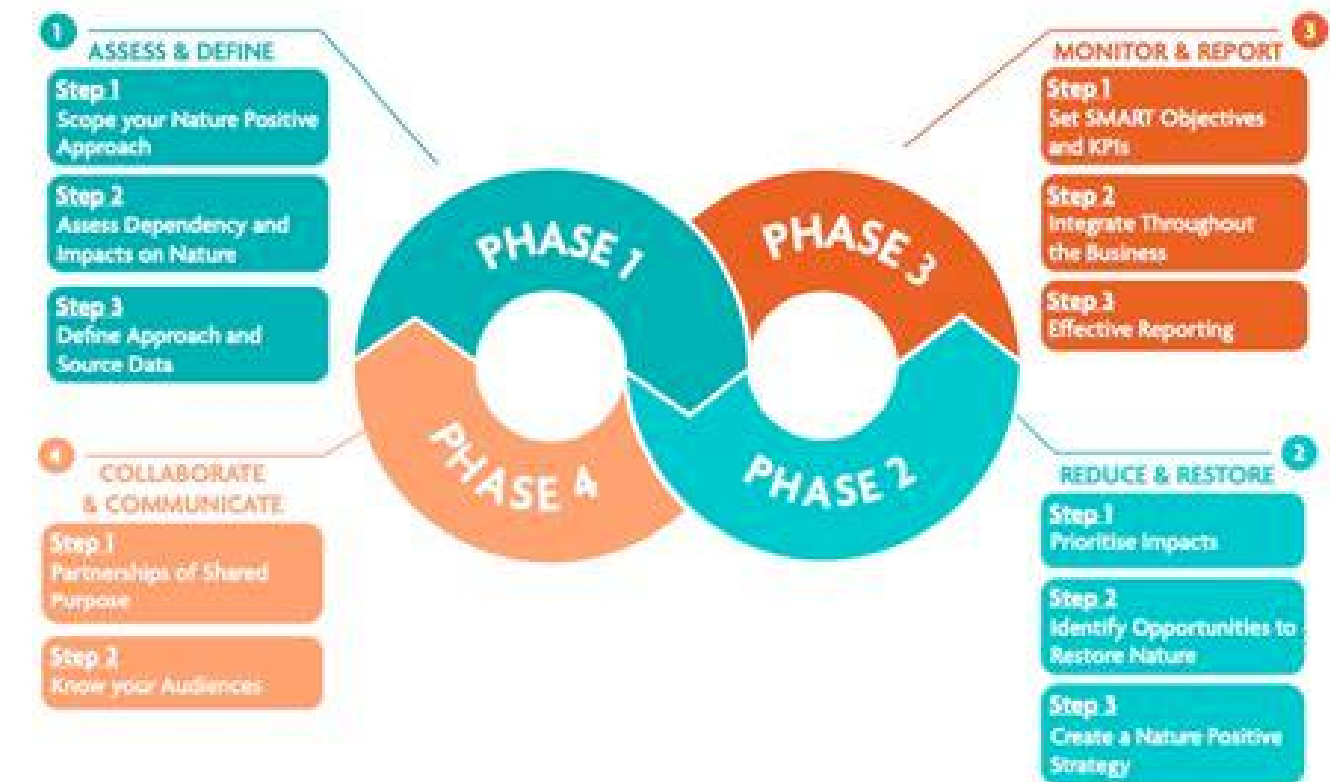


WTTC, 2022

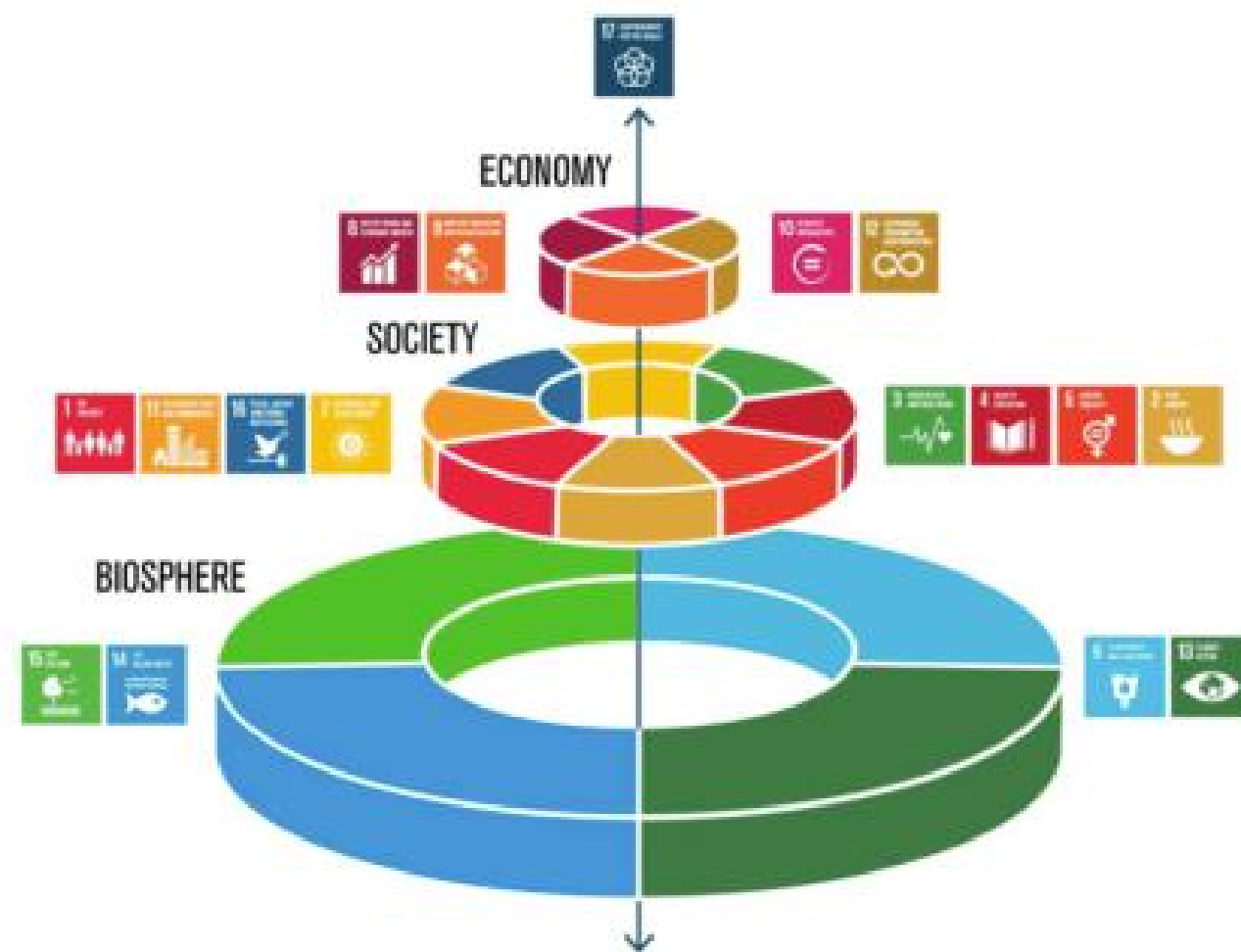


WTTC, 2024

NATURE POSITIVE TOURISM ROADMAP – Practical application



A Nature-Positive World: The Global Goal for Nature



*A nature-positive goal recognizes that the SDGs can only be realized if the **Biosphere related goals** are met.*

*The Biosphere (nature) related goals are not competing interests to be balanced with societal and economic goals, they are **the foundation of Society**, and Society is the foundation for all Economic activity.*

An underwater photograph showing a dense field of green seagrass. Sunlight rays penetrate the water from the top, creating a bright, hazy effect. The seagrass leaves are long and narrow, some showing signs of wear or damage. The overall color palette is dominated by deep blues and vibrant greens.

Blue Carbon: The carbon that is captured and stored by coastal and marine ecosystems, e.g. mangroves, seagrass, salt marshes





Tourism that **directly contributes to conservation and empowers communities** is exactly what's needed to enhance tourism's role in climate and biodiversity protection.



Rahui Nui marine sanctuary in Tahiti integrates ancestral practices into modern conservation efforts, engaging the local population as the stewards of their maritime spaces. (Source: [SPTO](#))



Palau works to combat climate change and boost community resilience by strengthening local community participation in tourism and agriculture, and conserving coastal ecosystems that act as carbon sinks. (Source: [STI](#))

Is ecotourism still relevant?

PRACTICE

The approaches and methodologies of supporting **conservation and communities** through responsible travel.

The outcomes and **lessons learned** from community tourism and tourism management in protected areas.

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The approaches and methodologies of supporting **conservation and communities** through responsible travel.

The outcomes and **lessons learned** from community tourism and tourism management in protected areas.

THEORY

Is today's ecotourism "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people"?

Or does / should it encompass ...
restoring what's lost
regenerating ecosystems
re-imagining what tourism can be



THANK
YOU



ayako@trainingaid.org



[linkedin.com/in/ayakoezaki/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/ayakoezaki/)