

# FROM EGO TO ECO

PERCEPTIONS, PRACTICES, AND COLLABORATIONS  
IN THE (ECO)TOURIST SECTOR IN SURINAME



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# **From Ego to Eco**

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~It is a blessing, living in a country with green gold~

Sergio Darius

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## Acknowledgement

Before the master program started, I already decided that I wanted to go back to Suriname. I started to think about possible topics for my research and came up with many ideas. I was excited to go back to an already familiar place that would hold a new challenge for me. For me it was the third time to go to Suriname. I finished my bachelor's fieldwork in 2014 and worked as a volunteer for NAKS<sup>1</sup> in 2015. Eventually, after blending my personal interests with a relevant issues in Suriname, and of course with the master program, I decided to study ecotourism. The tourist sector already fascinated me from the first time I visited Suriname due to the many tours going into the interior. It is a dynamic and vivid sector where everybody in Suriname seems to know people in. Also, the government announced to invest in the sector and make it one of the 'pillars' of the economy in a sustainable way. This seemed to fit perfectly within the lines of my study.

This thesis is the result of three months of fieldwork in Suriname from February till May 2016. I hope all the stories of the research participants are expressed and interpreted well. I decided to use fictional names, as some of the research participants indicated that they want to remain anonymous. Exceptions are the cases of Jozef Dinge and Caroline van Schubert, and the case of Sergio Darius, as they have no problems in being recognizable in the thesis. I want to thank all the people that participated in my research and made the thesis possible. They shared their knowledge and showed me the places where they go and thought would be important for me. Often I was impressed by the personal and sincere stories I have heard. This thesis is made possible by the tour operators, guides, tourists, people from the villages, critics on tourism, and employees from the ministry of Transport, Communication, and Tourism. Also, the Suriname Tourism Foundation (STS) and the Suriname Hospitality and Tourism Training Centre. Thanks for sharing your vision with me on ecotourism.

Special thanks goes out to the research participants that already were or became friends. Thanks Caroline van Schubert for always helping me out, criticizing me, and coming up with new ideas. Thanks Sergio Darius for all your invitations and putting all the effort in my research. Thanks to Mid Zandveld for sharing your ideas and always cheer me (and everyone else) up. I have much respect for your discipline and passion to always learn more about

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<sup>1</sup> Na Afrikan Kulturu fu Sranansma (NAKS) is a cultural organization that aims to promote the development of cultural and artistic traditions of Afro-Surinamese people. <http://nakssuriname.com/> last visited on 13-7-2016.

anything. Last but not least, thanks to Isan Corinde, my best friend who is always willing to hang around and/or drive me through the country and to research participants. I enjoyed our many moments in the car while I was in charge of the music.

Finally, I also want to express my gratitude towards Yvon van der Pijl, my supervisor during the whole process of setting up the research, doing the fieldwork and eventually writing the thesis. Especially in the writing part she knew how to motivate me to keep on writing, as I sometimes lost track of what I actually wanted to write. I enjoyed your personal but professional supervision and of course our shared love for Suriname.

Gran tangi – Thank you

## Map of Suriname

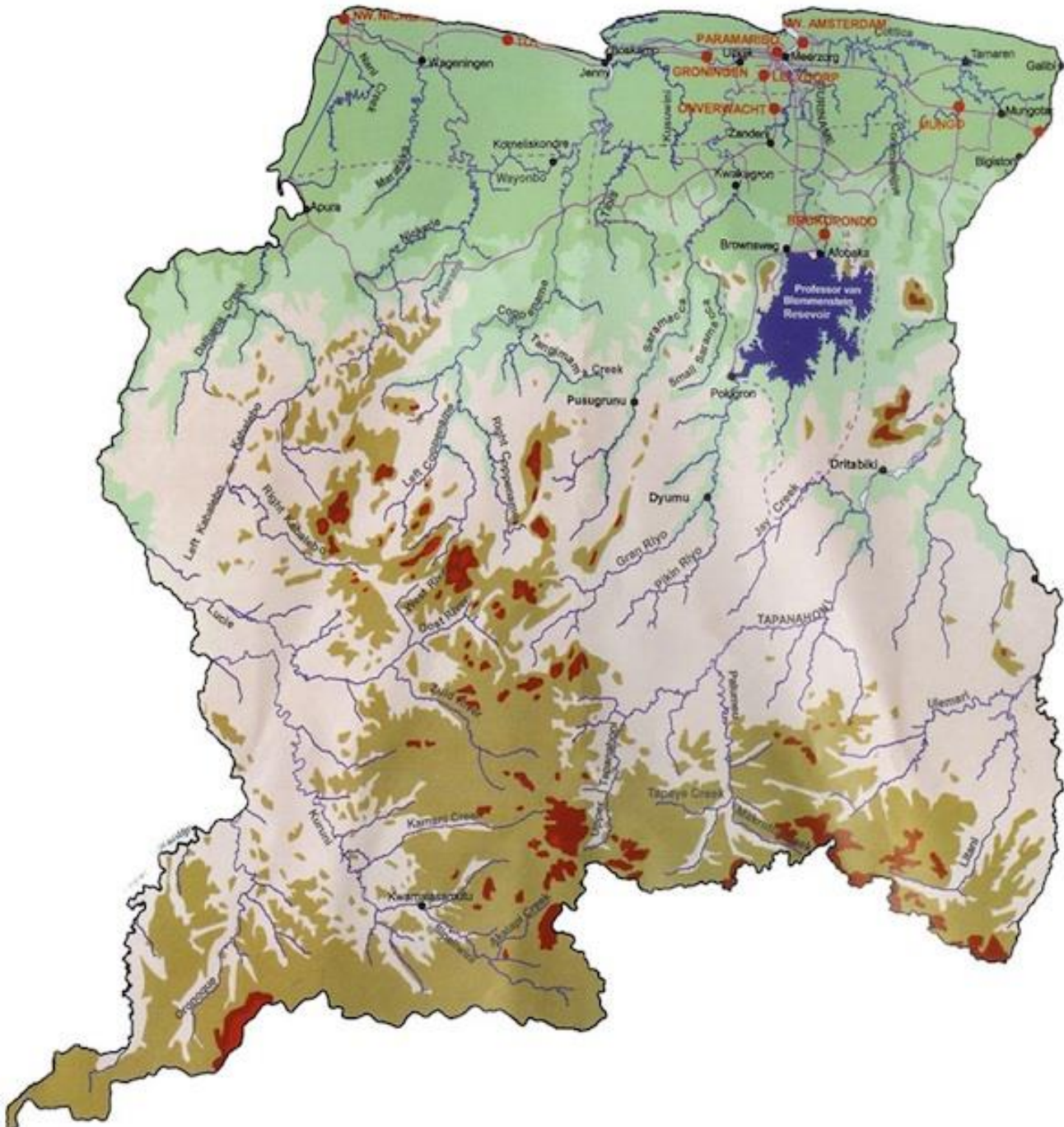


Figure 1: Map of Suriname from <http://gov.sr/sr/over-Suriname/landkaart.aspx>. Last visited on 23-7-2016.



## Tourist Hotspots in my Research



Figure 2: Tourist Hotspots in my Research

I created this map with Photoshop, to show the reader the places on the map that are discussed within this thesis. The locations on the map are not exact in geographical coordinates, as it is an indication/illustration for the reader to be able to orientate on the places I write about. These are the places, rivers, and area's that will be discussed during the thesis. I do not refer to the map during my thesis, but every location could be traced back.

## **Abstract**

The government of Suriname has announced to give the tourist sector a financial boost. As the prices of gold, oil, and bauxite are falling, the government is searching for alternatives to guarantee state income. Ecotourism is becoming one of the pillars that should bring money in the state treasury. In policy documents and speeches from politicians, it is said that the government wants the tourist sector to grow in a ‘sustainable way’. Academic literature and research do not always show similar findings when it comes to ecotourism. In literature, the balance between people, planet, and profit is seen as inevitable when it comes to ecotourism. The focus is often placed on the wellbeing of the people and the planet. However, the economic side of ecotourism turns out to be underexposed in academic findings, whilst in practice it appears to play a substantial role. This thesis shows that within the tourist sector in Suriname, money is often prioritized above the people, environment, and animals, by both tourist businesses and the government. The thesis is the result of scrutinizing the perceptions and practices of all the stakeholders concerned with (eco) tourism in Suriname. Thereby, it is analyzed how different actors collaborate in the sector to work towards a ‘sustainable’ form of tourism.

## Prologue

### ‘We are tired’

The atmosphere in Suriname changed at a rapid pace. I left the country for eight months and when I came back in February 2016, it felt like it had lost some amount of its magic. Nothing was left from the promising and exciting election period that turned the country’s people into an optimistic state of mind.

Since the beginning of 2016, the national treasury appears empty and a major part of the people is angry. Angry at the government and especially at the ruling president Desi Bouterse. He is accused by the protesters of spending all the state money. Namely, he is believed to have spent it on the previous elections and that he has divided the money amongst his family and friends. Because the state treasury ran out of money, the government has to look for options out of the country. The IMF promised to grant a loan of 472 million US dollar to the government of Suriname. The loan frightens many of the people that go on the streets because they think that the money will disappear in the same way as it did before. Many Surinamese people I have spoken with are afraid that the money will go to the ‘corrupt and nepotistic’ government and that their children and grandchildren will eventually suffer.

To express the dissatisfaction, every week the ‘We Are Tired’ (in Dutch: We Zijn Moe(dig)) movement demonstrates against the government at the Onafhankelijkheidsplein (Independence Square) in Paramaribo. The movement started with one young man who came to the square with a cardboard sign to strike against the government. The movement is growing every day in the first half year of 2016, which shows the increase of dissatisfaction amongst the people in Suriname. When looking at the square, it seems like the whole country is represented. Hundreds of people are demonstrating from all ages, gender, and different ethnic and social groups. They are not willing to accept the new prices for electricity and water that are disproportional. They do not intend to accept the prices for basic goods in the supermarket that are rising fast. The US dollar and euro course are rising fast with the result that the Surinamese dollar decreases in value. Many people who could barely make ends meet are now in trouble. On top of that, many employees that work directly or indirectly for the government, receive their salary late or not at all. As the results of the policy of the Bouterse administration become more visible, the people in the country start to mobilize.

The situation starts to show similarities with earlier governing periods where Bouterse was in a high political position as well. Buddingh (1999: 372) describes the same 'flying start' of the military regime in the early eighties and the Wijdenbosch government in the nineties. The urge to change a lot in the country worked counterproductive and most of the plans did not work out well. The same goes for the current government of Bouterse, who according to a young man and guide from the interior, promised a lot during the election period, but did not live up to its promises at all. Returning to the year 1998, where a similar situation took place, as discontent about the Wijdenbosch government increased amongst the people due to the results of economic mismanagement (Buddingh' 1999: 386). Also, the inflation and devaluation of the Surinamese guilder hit the purchasing power of the people. Government facilities like healthcare and education suffered due to a lack of money (Buddingh' 1999: 387). The trade union led by Fred Derby started to organize mass demonstrations that grew quickly in number. Eventually, it was inevitable that Wijdenbosch resigned (Buddingh' 1999: 387). From the beginning of 2016, the country is in a similar political and economic crisis. According to a high civil servant, there is only one but major difference. 'Bouterse will never resign. He is a military, and will fight until his death. His people will fight until their death. Thereby, resigning increases the chance that he will be prosecuted for his alleged involvement with the December murders in 1982.' The chance that Bouterse will resign is thus considered as minimal. Also, many people are employed by the government and afraid that they will lose their job if they go on the streets to demonstrate. One of the research participants, a civil servant from the ministry of Transport, Communication, and Tourism, says he supports the demonstrations but he would not participate in it. Sitting in his office, where the map of Suriname is prominent, we talk about tourism and politics in Suriname. He feels free to talk about politics, which is not always the case when speaking with civil servants in Suriname. He talks for hours as he expresses his concerns about the political and financial situation in the country. Zaar has a high political position and would not want to put his job at risk. He knows for sure that he would lose his job if he would go outside to demonstrate. Zaar would want to the government to resign and get replaced by more educated people. The following expression during the interview illustrates his opinion.

Yes we always complain about our government, it is some kind of sports, but now the complaining is over. We have to stand up for our rights as citizens of Suriname and not tolerate the political order anymore. However, I am not going to the streets because than I will lose my job, but I do encourage everyone to go, for example on Facebook.

The situation gives me mixed feelings. On the one hand I am glad that people are aware of the unfortunate political and financial situation they are in. Also, I admire their courage to stand up for their rights against a dominant government that is usually not very welcoming for critique. On the other hand it feels like it is the beginning of a more unfortunate, maybe inevitable, political and financial situation. As the government labels the protesters as ‘not supportive for the community’ and ‘rioters’, the people are divided into two camps fighting each other. The president has announced not to resign until the next elections. For him, there are too many interests entwined to step back. With other examples of countries demonstrating against their government in my mind, I get a uncomfortable feeling. Obviously the political and financial situation require a transformation, but who is going to pay the price? The people with the lowest incomes already struggle to make ends meet. With the prices rising fast in the supermarkets, the middle class is hit as well. In the streets people talk with each other about the ridiculous prices of for example garlic and bread.

As the situation dominates the daily life in the country, it also influenced the stories of my research participants. Everyone I talked with shared their worries and mentioned the current economic and political situation at least once. Some talked about it for hours, and could go on for days. What is also of importance to mention, is that partly because of the functioning of the government and the lack of money, the tourist sector has ‘grown’ the way it is now. Without describing the context of the political and economic situation in Suriname, the stories and the thesis would not be complete. So, during the thesis I will refer to and elaborate on the national context in Suriname because it is inseparable from the whole research.

July 14, 2016



## Introduction

The Anton Dragtenweg is a big road that leads one through the North of Paramaribo city. Alongside the road are shops and houses. My destination is on the right side, the house looks not like the other buildings along the road at all. The taxi driver laughs and says: this must be European people, look at all the bushes in the garden. Suriname people do not have such gardens. Then Sergio walks towards the gate, I have never seen him before but he immediately gives me a *brasa* (hug) like we know each other for years. Indeed, his garden does not look like a 'typical decent' Surinamese one. It is not cut and cared for, but everything is in its natural shape. Sergio invites me to walk through his garden. He is busy making it a 'walk in eco garden' for people who would like to hang out in a natural area in the city. People can pick fruit from the trees, chill, and enjoy the biodiversity. In a first glance it looks like a small garden with a lot of trees, but when walking further there is a lot of space to grow more. He invites me to come inside and talk more about tourism. The living room looks light and a bit messy, though it feels comfortable with a nice view on the balcony with dogs and hammocks. As Sergio walks down his living room, I see his dreadlocks float next to his long, thin body. The constant worrying look on his face when talking about the Amazon illustrates his dedication to it. He mentions the potential for Suriname to become more dependent on the tourist sector. "We have so many rainforest in Suriname, we should diminish the mining and focus on ecotourism. What we need is a mentality change of the people thinking from their ego to eco. Right now we are destroying our habitat in our search for money." Sergio has been a tour guide since he was a little boy, guiding for many tour operators. Now he started his own business and, according to his own words, thinking about ways to leave the smallest footprint as possible.

Ecotourism is pointed out in literature as a form of responsible traveling to natural regions which takes the environment into account and betters the economic situation and wellbeing of the local people (Jayawardena 2002: 11). However, in practice it turns out that perceptions differ on the definition of ecotourism. The most common perception of ecotourism I found in Suriname seems more similar to nature tourism. As a policy employee from the ministry of Transport, Communication, and Tourism strikingly told me: "we do not have ecotourism, we have nature tourism in Suriname. Ecotourism takes the environment and people into account, nature tourism focuses on tourist activities in natural areas." During the interviews it becomes clear that he has a point. I ask every research participant to explain his or her perception of what ecotourism enfolds. One of the policy advisors seems indignant by my question if Suriname has ecotourism. "Of course we have ecotourism girl, look at all the rainforests we

have. How much more eco can you get?!” Another research participant, a tour guide, describes ecotourism as being one with nature. Being one with nature is one part of ecotourism and the other part is showing and sharing this feeling with tourists who will hopefully experience the same. Perceptions on ecotourism diverge, what will become clear during this thesis.

Next to different perceptions on what ecotourism is, there are different views on what ecotourism could bring about. Ecotourism implies that it would conserve nature and improve the wellbeing of local people. However, it could also be seen as ‘conventional capitalism’, decorated with socially and environmentally rhetoric. Critics argue that the ‘package’ of ecotourism is some sort of guise for business as usual (Stronza 2001: 275). Many tour operators call themselves ‘eco’ according to websites and flyers, whilst their practices show otherwise. According to almost all my research participants, the sector has become a ‘Wild West’ sector. The competition is high and tour operators involved in ecotourism are companies whose aim is to maximize profits. An intermediary who sells tours explains that the situation on the ground gets harsher.

The competition is intense. If I put on Facebook that I offer a tour for 100 euros to Brownsberg, a well-known nature park located in the district Brokopondo, the next day someone else does it for 90 euros. It is tough. You have to keep in motion. Students have a low budget and in general they do not care about ‘eco’.<sup>2</sup> This is where we have to search for the medium.

Another tour operator and guide describes the sector as a ‘hustling culture’. As he explains, in the first place, the ‘hustling culture’ would stem from the abolition of the license requirement for tour operators. Since 2012, everyone is able to start a touring company. Second, the poor financial condition in the country makes people more attracted to sectors where they ‘easily’ can find foreign money without experience and/or education. The implication is that the aim for profit reduces the intentions to protect nature or improve the lives of local people. Ecotourism is often used as a marketing tool that could hide irresponsible tourism practices under its name (cf. Wallace and Russell 2004A: 2).

A concept that is often used in researches and policies with regard to ecotourism, is the triple bottom line, also known as the three pillars of sustainability. This involves the balance between

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<sup>2</sup> In Surinam, many Dutch and Belgian students do their internships. They are the major group of tourists mentioned by most tour operators and guides.

the three P's: People, Planet and Profit that together illustrate sustainability. By working with the three pillars, I am able to explain and show my argument that economic profit is often put above the planet and the people. According to Adams (2006: 2), the three pillars of economic profit, protection of the environment, and social progress should be better integrated. However, the pillars are not seen as equivalent so the proposition about interconnectedness disappears. Space arises here to introduce two new P's in the thesis. First, the P of participation, as (more) participation of local people in the tourist sector is considered of importance by all the research participants. Second, is the P of power, as the sector holds stakeholders that have more influence than others have. The addition of two P's, might help to understand the imbalance of the pillars better. Other concepts I will work with are Tsing's (2005) collaborations and frontier, to analyze and illustrate how different actors collaborate and perceive and use the Amazon. Same goes for Stronza (2010) who writes about common pool resources, which I use to show how management of the commons becomes more complex as the amount of users increases.

## **Research Methods**

The data I gathered during the fieldwork came from the use of multiple qualitative research methods. I have conducted semi-structured and open interviews to map the field of actors and to get to know their perception of 'ecotourism'. To obtain more in depth knowledge of the policy on ecotourism, I conducted expert interviews and analyzed policy documents. For my case studies and to see the perceptions in practice, I observed and participated in tourist activities. By using different research methods, I made use of triangulation. Triangulation is the use of multiple methods, to make sure you come to the same data when using different methods. The use of different research methods was useful, as perception and practice sometimes turned out to be different.

I conducted semi-structured and open interviews with twenty-one research participants in the range of three months. Also, I had informal conversations with approximately fifty people. Most of my research participants were men, as most of the tour operators and guides who work in the tourist sector are men. Next to the interviews and conversations, I joined tour operators in preparing activities like meetings and the purchase of products for the tours. What I consider as the most useful method is that I joined tourist trips and observed the practices of ecotourism in real life. These trips consisted of both daytrips and longer trips of three or four days into the interior. The trips gave me the opportunity to talk with a lot of people in the field and observe 'ecotourism' as it really goes.

The observing and participant observation during tourist activities sometimes showed other things than were said in the interviews. Here becomes the value of triangulation visible. The perceptions of ecotourism as mentioned by the different actors did not always match the behaviour in practice. For instance, as a researcher I had the privilege to see how trips are prepared. A ‘behind the scenes’ view that showed contradicting practices. When I interviewed a freelance guide about his perception on ecotourism, he told me that ‘eco’ for him means taking care of the environment and of the people. In short, he meant not harming the environment and helping local people financially. After the interview he had to go shopping for the upcoming tour of the next days. He invited me to come with him, and literally everything that the tourists were going to eat was already bought. Instead of buying products locally, it was cheaper to go to a certain supermarket in the north of Paramaribo.

Furthermore, I conducted expert interviews at the ministry of Transport, Communication, and Tourism, to get more inside knowledge about policies and governmental views on ecotourism. I also conducted expert interviews with the director of the Tourism Foundation Suriname, and the chairman of the Suriname Hospitality and Tourism Training Centre. During these interviews I was handed various policy documents which I analysed and used especially in chapter three to support my argument.

Analyzing flyers and websites was also part of my research methods. The promotional material of tour operators on websites and/or flyers shows the message they want to communicate to the tourists, whether they are actively involved in for instance local participation and conservation projects.

Reading newspapers and analyzing articles concerning ecotourism contributed to my knowledge around the subject.

### My Research Position

As Jordan (2001: 42) described, the age, gender, outsider status, and lived experience of the researcher are able to ‘open up avenues of discovery and inhibit others’. This idea has become axiomatic amongst anthropologists. I need to reflect on my characteristics as a researcher, because it certainly influenced the way research participants interacted with me. As a young, white, and Dutch woman, I am viewed in Suriname mostly as a Dutch intern. Dutch interns are according to all the actors in the tourist sector the largest group of tourists, which marked me for most of the people a ‘tourist’ as well. Many of my research participants wanted to collaborate with me as they saw possibilities for promotion. They wanted to help me with

my research if I would promote their tours amongst my ‘Dutch intern friends’. For my research I wanted to join tourist trips to the interior as this would contribute to my understanding of ecotourism practices. However, these trips are expensive and soon I found out that it was not going to work for free, also because I am seen as a white and wealthy tourist. Some tour operators offered me discount if I would take ‘friends’ with me on a tour. These invitations often reminded me of the fact that I am an outsider. I will, during the whole research period, be seen and approached as a tourist. When I joined tourist groups, I did my participant observation as a tourist because this was the most ‘natural’ way to fit in.

To reflect on myself as a researcher is of importance because I am the person that analyzes all the stories of the research participants. Jordan (2001: 41) also sees the anthropologist as the main research tool, which is engaged in many acts of complexity concerning interrogating the self as well as the other. The stories the research participants shared with me are constructions of their truths that I translated and interpreted into this thesis. As Jordan (2001: 45) states evident: ‘as the product of interaction between ethnographer and informants rather than any objective truth about informants’ worlds, even ‘unadventurous’ ethnography now requires an explicit situating of its author and of the nature and limits of her authority’.

## Structure

The thesis follows the logic of three chapters named People, Planet, and Profit, with which I will eventually show that the last pillar is seen as more important than the others. Chapter one, People, will first introduce the various stakeholders in the field and the collaborations between them. After that I will show that the local people are the ones that profit the least from tourism and their presence in decision-making processes is nihil. However, it is mentioned by all stakeholders that local people should benefit and participate. Local people are still excluded from participating due to various reasons I will show. The second chapter, Planet, will show that earnings from tourism are hardly invested in conserving nature. The money flow goes directly to tour operators and guides, instead of for instance education on conservation or to societal organizations that work on conservation. Then, the last chapter Profit, demonstrates that money comes above the people and the planet. The Wild West sector illustrates the search for (foreign) money. Furthermore, the government wants (eco) tourism to be one of the main sectors to create revenue on a short term to fill the state treasury. Plans to increase the tourist sector both fast and sustainable, are by research participants questioned as a guise to make fast money.





## Chapter 1: People

‘‘The sector looks like a jungle. So many people, so many actors. So few earning money from it. A jungle. Or a Wild West it is called’’. Sven, a critical voice on tourism in Suriname mentioned the amount of actors and complexity in the sector. Sven writes about tourism and he is called a tourism expert by many other research participants and in newspapers. As we sit and drink something at one of the most known bars in the city, he overloads me with criticism about every part of the sector possible. From airlines not doing anything with sustainable options, to the lack of a responsible waste system, and to the government that does not set enough legislation to regulate the sector. Sven does not point out one responsible actor, but ascribes it to all the actors in the sector who carry responsibility for a more sustainable sector. According to him, there is not enough clarity about what to do and how to collaborate amongst the actors who want to work towards ecotourism. I created a figure, to give an overview of the variety of actors that are involved in the tourist sector. With the figure, I also want to illustrate the interconnectedness between them. Though the actors work and think from a different point of view, the actual decisions often hold close links or (should) go in collaboration with others. They need each other.

### The Actors

In figure one below, the main actors are illustrated. Some actors need some more explanation as the information in the figure is concise. The tourists consist mostly of Dutch and Belgian students. Also diaspora and Guyanese people often visit Suriname. Tour operators mostly work for themselves or are registered as semi-private businesses. VESTOR is the association for Surinamese tour operators. The association is especially occupied with creating a standard for a license for tour operators. Although, not all tour operators are connected to this association due to various reasons. One of my research participants said that the tour operators that are united in VESTOR are a select group of tour operators favoring each other. Tour operators that are not officially registered are also not active in the association. Next actor, the state, consists of different parts that are occupied with tourism. First the government, who takes the final decisions. Second the department of Transport, Communication, and Tourism who make the policy around tourism. The Suriname Tourism Foundation is the executive body of the department and government. Furthermore, there are foundations linked to government that are involved in tourism like the foundation for nature conservation STINASU and NIMOS, an institute for environment and development.

The last actor that needs some further explanation are the Maroons and Indigenous, the local people described in this thesis. The Indigenous, also referred to as Indians, are the first inhabitants of Suriname (Buddingh' 1999: 13). The Arawaks were the first Indigenous group that inhabited the area and together with the Caribs the two largest groups of Indigenous living in Suriname before the white settlers came (Buddingh' 1999: 13). Maroon, coming from the word marronage, is the name given to the people that fled the plantations during the colonial period (Buddingh' 1999: 117). People that were held as slaves fled into the forest to live without the colonial oppression. This is how Maroon villages originated and became larger when the people in the villages were able to live self-sufficient, without food and other necessities from the plantation (Buddingh' 1999: 117-120). Nowadays, Indigenous and Maroon groups still live in the interior, and their villages are popular destinations for visitors.

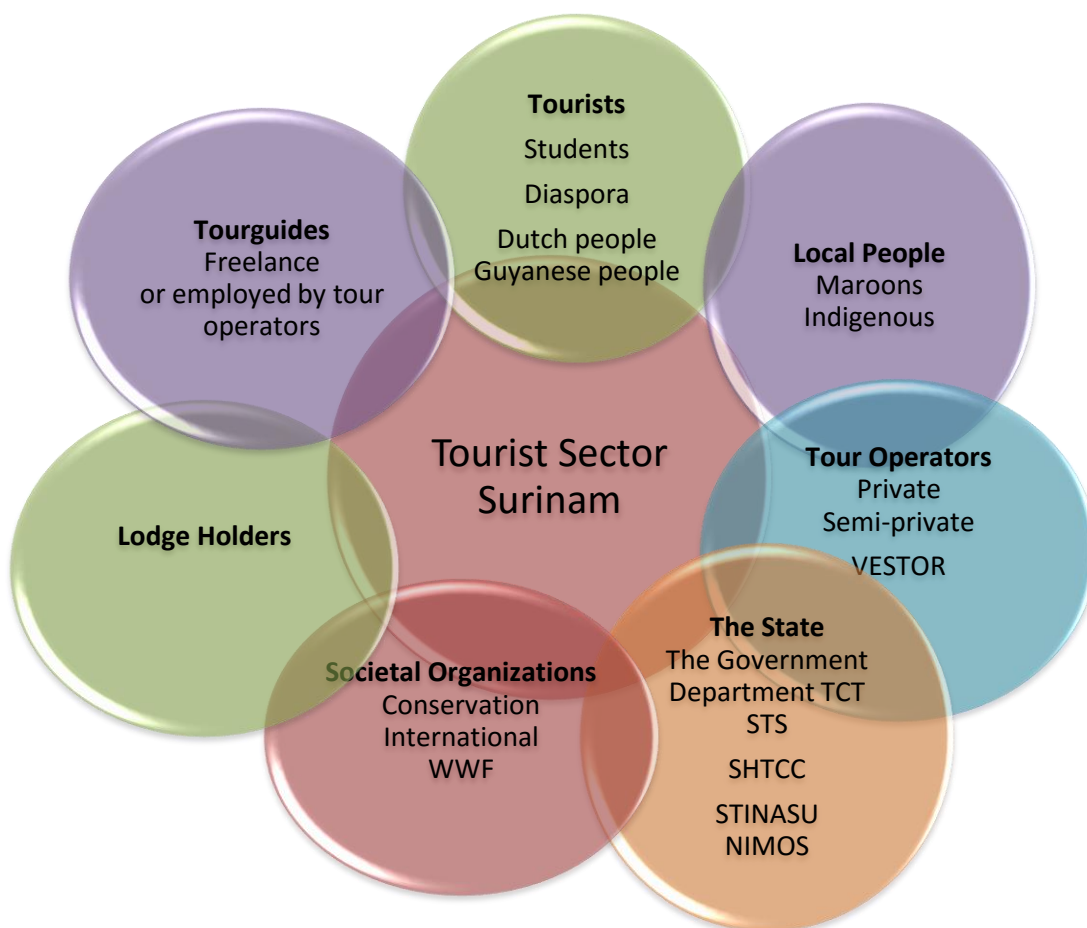


Figure 2: The Actors <sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> List of abbreviations in appendix

When looking at the figure, the interdependence becomes clear. None of the actors is able to act independently from one another. Collaboration is needed amongst them. For instance, tour operators need tourists to participate in their activities and make money. Tourists on their turn need a tour operator who brings them into the interior. They also need a guide, who works for the tour operator and accompanies them during the trip. Tour operators also have to make agreements with lodge holders, the ones who own the housing facilities. Societal organizations like Conservation International or the World Wildlife Fund have to collaborate with different actors depending on their goals. If they want to build for example ecolodges, they have to work together with lodge holders and tour operators. Also, the local people need to give permission for tourist and other activities to take place in their villages. In general, local people have to collaborate with all the actors to be able to participate in the sector. Then, the state lacks participating in collaborations. However, it is mentioned by all the actors as important that the state will come up with more legislation. As will become evident later, the state currently lacks the capability in both money and knowledge, to live up to the demands from the sector. In short, the collaborations illustrated above show that the actors depend on each other. Later on, through empirical examples, the collaborations will become lively. The actors have to work together despite they have different perceptions about how tourist activities should look like.

As I found out in the field, ecotourism has not one meaning shared by all just as in academic literature. Varying perceptions of ecotourism result in different expectations. This complicates collaborations, as every actor wants to come as closely to his or her own perception about what ecotourism is. Another, even more complicating factor, is that people ‘from the same actor’ also hold different perceptions. By this I mean that for example tour operators do not have the same perceptions of ecotourism among each other. Individual perceptions of ecotourism might differ from each other which Sergio describes as ‘individual idealism’ because in his opinion, every individual has his or her idea of how important protecting the planet and people actually is. As I asked all of my research participants to explain his or her perception of ecotourism to me, I found out that the content of the term is also broadly interpreted. For some people being in natural areas with tourists is already ecotourism. For other research participants the focus was especially on protecting local people and their habits. Another different perspective holds that the main goal of ecotourism is sustaining income for the tour operators and guides. As I will show, these different views could be hard to unite during collaborations.

### **The Money Flow**

One of the main priorities of ecotourism next to conserving the planet, is the protection of local people and their participation in tourist activities. Wallace and Russell (2004B: 236) argue that tourism could be seen as the big bad wolf of the modern era. They assume that tourism frequently is non-sustainable and exploitative because local people do not profit as much as the initial developers do. Also, Stem (2003: 324) and many other researchers claim that economic revenues do not reach the local people. Often, tour operators make it look like local people earn money because of tourism. For instance, when tour operators bring tourists to local villages, tourists might buy products in local shops or even directly from the people. People also could get the chance to work in resorts maybe as a cleaner, cook, or in an administrative function. However, tour operators and guides profit by far the most.

As an illustration, Palumeu is referred to by many research participants during interviews. The example is interesting because many research participants mentioned it, but some used it as a 'good' example whilst others used it as a statement for 'bad ecotourism'. Palumeu is located in the middle/south of Suriname, the Gran Rio area, where the Trio and Wajana natives live. One of the biggest tour operators METS, which is also a part of the national airline SLM, carries out tours towards a jungle lodge near Palumeu. On the one hand, it is said by research participants that METS invests money in the people and in the village in general. When seeing their website it becomes clear that they are involved in many societal projects in Palumeu and the rest of the area<sup>4</sup>. These projects concern natural conservation projects and cultural heritage projects. For a part of the research participants, this is what ecotourism should look like. "METS gives local people the opportunity to work and to improve their skills" is said by a guide who worked for METS for many years. On the other hand, Sven, the tourism expert, says that tourists book tours with METS back home, so all the money flows directly to the tour operator instead of the people. Consequently the tour operator invests in the things he or she finds important. The tour operator holds the power to choose where to invest money in. The local people might profit from tourism, but they do not have a voice to decide where the money goes to.

Another example where the money flows directly to the tour operator is the case of the Raleighvallen. The Raleighvallen are part of the nature reserve of Central Suriname that is managed by STINASU, an organization for nature conservation set by the government<sup>5</sup>. An

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.mets.sr/nl/> last visited on 20-6-16.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.stinasu.sr/> last visited on 28-6-16.



island in the reserve is equipped for tourists to eat and sleep. The people who work on Fungu Island are employed by STINASU. According to Akaash, who works for Conservation International, the people receive a small salary. As Akaash mentioned, the reserve should create employment for local people from Witagron, the first village ‘close’ to the reserve. However, in practice almost all the people working at Fungu Island (guides, cooks, cleaners, and administrators) are people from other places than Witagron. Most people are originally from the interior but currently living somewhere else. Local people barely work at the resort. Thereby, tourists book their tour to the interior from their country of origin or via a booking office or tour operator when they arrive in (almost always) Paramaribo. The tour operators receive the money, which they spend on food, transport, housing facilities and additional needs. The participating role of local people is minimal. Whilst every actor indicates and suggests a big role for local people in the tourist sector, it turns out in practice that they do barely participate in the whole process of organizing, administrating, and facilitating.

### **Gunsi**

In literature the importance of the wishes of local people is emphasized (Wallace and Russell 2004A: 2). What kind of tourists do local people actually want? Daytrippers or tourists who stay somewhat longer? Foreign tourists or domestic tourists? What kind of relationships do they want to maintain? These questions should be important to eventually have local people participating more. I praise the egalitarian starting point of this idea, but what I have seen in Suriname is that the local people do not have anything to say about who could or could not come. What kind of people that come visit a village or a tourist resort, depends on who is capable to pay the price of such a tourist trip. Local people do not get to decide what kind of persons come to their village in any tourist place I have visited in Suriname. They are the hosts of tourists without having a say about who these tourists will be, where they come from, what gender they are etcetera. On top of that, in Suriname they do not have such large numbers of tourists that they have the ‘luxury’ to choose between which tourists could and could not come visit. What local people could do, is inventing activities for tourists so the local people do have a say in what tourists do when they are in their village. The maroon village Gunsi is an example where local people organize optional activities for tourists. The transmigration village is located in the Upper Suriname area. After the building of the dam in the Brokopondo Lake in 1963, the people were forced to leave and moved to the Upper Suriname River. Now about seventy people live in the village. Further information about the village is provided on the

website<sup>6</sup>. I visited Gunsi already two times as a tourist in 2014 and 2015 before I went back for fieldwork. Every year the village manages to improve tourist facilities and activities. Local people take more initiatives for activities and there are ‘green’ initiatives like solar panels, reducing the use of PET bottles, and the collecting of rainwater.

I talk with Kuuksie, the administrator of the ‘Tei Wei’ resort on Gunsi. It is the second night of my stay on Gunsi, when we sit under a marquise and drink rum with cola. He is a young man, who wants to continue the work of his grandfathers who started in the early nineties with the tourist resort in the village. He says that he is constantly busy with involving people from the village and getting young people back to the village that moved to Paramaribo. Actually, he says that tourism is dependent on the participation of villagers. That makes Gunsi an exception in the tourist sector, because Kuuksie sees other resorts not doing much for the local people. In surrounding resorts, tour operators organize trips with all facilities and needs inclusive. Guides, activities, and food are already taken care of beforehand, which makes the participation of local people less necessary. The tour operator then forms an island for the tourists. There is less to almost no interaction with local people, as the tourists only ‘observe’ the local people in their daily lives. Kuuksie says that this form of tourist activities does not help the Maroon people at all as they do not get the chance to participate. Plus, the local people do not like it because they feel viewed as tourists constantly take photos and videos of their daily activities without asking permission. One woman from Brownsveg, close to the nature parc Brownsberg, told me during an informal conversation that she wonders if what she does on a daily basis is so strange. People, not only tourists but also people from Paramaribo, observe and photograph her when she is doing her ‘normal’ daily pursuits like cooking, hanging the laundry outside, and working in the garden. “I feel that I make people curious about what I do. What is it that I do? Is it the clothes that I wear? Or is it the way that I wash the clothes? I do not know, but obviously it is interesting what I do.” The woman says she would not mind people taking pictures of her if they would ask permission to do so. Many tourist trips I have seen myself, incorporate a stop while traveling to their final destination. Little Maroon or Indigenous villages along the way get a quick (toilet) stop from tourist groups. Little explanation and time make tourists ‘run’ through the village, take as many pictures as possible, and then continue the trip. Interaction between tourists and local people stays out, which possibly creates mutual incomprehension as both sides do not know much about each other.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://gunsiteiwei.wordpress.com/gunsi/> Last visited on 3-7-16.

Caroline, one of my friends who is often in contact with people who live on Gunsii, tells me that the local people are full of questions as well. Who are these tourists? What do they do in daily life? The local people only see the 'tourist' side of people who come and visit them and are at their turn also interested in what tourists do in their daily life. The mutual interest is a connection point that could be used for more interaction and sharing of knowledge between tourists and local people.

### **Representation and Tourismification**

The empirical example as described above, shows similarities to the documentary named 'Framing the Other' by Ilja Kok and Willem Timmers (2011). Namely, the documentary shows the lack of interaction between tourists and Mursi people in South Ethiopia. Tourists visit a Mursi village for about half an hour. They take pictures, pay money, and leave. Both the tourists and the Mursi people do not know much more about each other than the brief encounters they have. Consequently, the Mursi people start to behave to the wishes of the tourists. Because the tourists mainly want to see (photograph) the lip rings and other body decorations of the women, the women start to wear more decorations that are not even part of their traditions. The more decoration the women wear, the more money comes in. The documentary shows an awkward encounter between a group of Dutch tourists and Mursi people, which is not more than taking pictures and negotiating about money. The Mursi people do not understand why tourists are taking photos of them and what they are going to do with these photos.

A possible consequence where Sylvain (2005: 356) writes about, is the commodification of culture that could result from ethno tourism. When tourists visit a specific ethnic group for 'cultural expressions' like the lip rings and other body decorations, the chance exists that local people are going to behave towards the expectations and desires of tourists. Local people could become dependent on tourism for subsistence and 'selling' parts of their traditions to earn money. In some situations, for instance with the Mursi people, it also happens that they make up or overdo cultural traditions to earn more money from tourism. Homogenizing of the ethnic group makes it easy for local people to represent themselves to tourists, but it does not represent how they live per se (Salazar 2009: 50).

According to Salazar (2009: 50) this could result in a loss of cultural common sense and pride. Furthermore, Salazar (2009: 50) argues that local communities often have no other choice than to agree and go with tourist initiatives adapting to the what he calls tourismified identities and cultural perceptions that are invented for them. This could also contribute to unequal power

relations that exist between tour operators and local people. I will elaborate on the unequal power relations later, as local people do mostly not have a say in various decision making processes.

Earlier in this chapter I wrote about Palumeu and the mixed views my research participants have on the tourist destination. Several research participants talked about cultural performances at Palumeu that were given for tourist entertainment. Some of them felt ashamed about it because it would not represent people as they live now, whilst others thought it was a good tourist attraction. Local people from Palumeu give dance and singing performances that are labeled as ‘traditional Indigenous’. However, the expert in tourism Sven, argues that this is only what tourists want to see. Tourists do not want to see Indigenous people having cell phones, televisions, and wearing jeans just like the tourists. They want to see the ‘ethnic other’ who wears different clothes, makes different music, lives in huts, and eats different food. A woman organizing trips for a big tour operator says that the ritual activities from the local people might become organized only because the tourists want to see it and pay for it. This does not have to be worrisome at all, but it could become a problem when local people present it in a way how they expect tourists want to see it. The representation of a group is then made by the (colonial) stereotypes of tour operators and tourists (Salazar 2009: 50).

### **Gunsi**

On Gunsi, there is also a music band consisting of local people that sometimes performs for tourists. However, Kuuksie tells me, the band plays contemporary Maroon music influenced by popular music from Paramaribo. The band is not only there to show tourists the Maroon culture, but to entertain and promote themselves via their music. They are not told by tour operators, guides or tourists how and what to perform. The example illustrates again that participation of local people in tourism is stimulated in various ways on Gunsi.

As I argued earlier, Gunsi could be seen more as an exception than the rule. Without the participation of the local people, Kuuksie thinks the tourist resort is not able to function. Kuuksie mentions that he wants to enlarge the number of tourists and in that way employ more people in the village. This would at the same time create space to learn more about Maroon traditions like the use of medicinal plants and ways of cultivating and cooking food. To show and do this with tourists, would help to prevent the decrease of knowledge and skills Kuuksie experiences. As more people move from the interior to Paramaribo, the way Maroons live, or

used to live, starts to disappear says Kuuksie. More tourism could mean a beneficial situation for all he says.

In the village, everybody has to be able to do everything. Fishing, swimming, making boats, chopping, shooting, cooking, baking cassava, etcetera. Most people now go and work in the city because that is where they could earn money. How nice would it be if people could come back to Gunsi and make money and live how our ancestors used to live. I know they are willing to, because I speak often to people who live in Paramaribo now. I have lived there myself, but the opportunity to go back appealed to me. I want to create chances for the people here. The combination with tourism fits perfectly, as tourists often ask to see ‘typical’ maroon habits. They are interested in how we do things our way because we live close to nature. And we like to show and share it because we are proud of it.

He describes the interaction between tourists and local people as the formula of success. ‘‘The people of Gunsi are comfortable with tourists and the tourists are comfortable with the local people’’. This comfortability stems partly from clear ‘unwritten rules’ the tourists are told. Before tourists enter the village, they are learned for example how to greet in Saramaccan language<sup>7</sup>. For the local people this is important as it is for them a sign of respect. As I walk through the village in the morning, people say ‘‘i weki no’’, which means good morning, than look at me curiously until I answer with ‘‘mi weki o’’, that is good morning in return. It probably does not sound as it should, but the friendly and laughing expression on their faces shows that they appreciate me trying. Also, tourists are told to minimize photography and filming. If they do want to make pictures or movies, they need to ask permission from the people. Jozef Dinge explains this to the tourists before they enter the village. Most of the tourists that visit Gunsi come with Jozef. He started as a tour operator in 2013 and mainly facilitates tours to Gunsi, where a part of his family comes from. Jozef already started working as a guide in tourism in 2004, but saw the tourist resort in Gunsi slide in bankruptcy and decided to give it one last chance. He set up his own company Jozef Eco Tours and started to facilitate tours to the Maroon village. It was hard work according to Jozef, because the resort was in bad repair and had a bad reputation amongst booking offices and tourists. Slowly, the resort started to recover and tourists started to come back to Gunsi. Now, 2016, Jozef Eco Tours facilitates at least one tour to Gunsi each week. Sometimes even more and now his cousin is part of his

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<sup>7</sup> Saramaccan is the language of Saramacca people, the largest Maroon group living in Surinam.



enterprise as well. Jozef ascribes the achievement of Jozef Eco Tours to multiple reasons. Collaboration for him is the precondition to be ‘successful’ in the sector. He does not see other tour operators or guides as competition, but rather as colleagues and friends. If one tour operator makes mistakes, it will influence the next one. Also, booking offices are very helpful partners as they recommend tours. Even the driver from the airport is seen as important, because he or she is part of the whole Suriname experience “Suriname is one country, we are all from the same soil and we have to do it together. On your own you do not have a strong position and unity is important”. He wonders what would have happened if he would see the people from Gunsî as ‘nothing’. With certainty he knows that his tours would not have lasted long without collaboration. For Jozef, the contact he has with local people characterizes ecotourism. Also, the way tourists get in touch with the local people. For both it should be a good experience to learn more. Jozef involves everybody with tourism on Gunsî.

The people from the village have no problems with tourists. Everybody checks on each other. Yesterday I went to the forest with tourists and after the walk we immediately went back to the city. I took another path and forgot to sign out. The same evening I got a call from the village and the people asked me if we were already back. Many people from the village share the feeling of responsibility. Tourists are treated just as villagers treat each other.

As I mentioned before, the success of Jozef’s tourist enterprise is ascribed to several reasons. First of all, his family is from Gunsî and he knows almost everyone in the village, which makes it easier to communicate about tourist activities. People dare to approach him when they have new ideas or when there are situations that bother them. Second, his knowledge about the Maroon culture and biodiversity determine a part of the ‘quality’ of his tours. Because he has his origins in the village, he is an expert in telling tourists stories about the area as he is so familiar with it. He knows where he is talking about. The third reason is that he only does tours with small amounts of tourists. Jozef mentions that going with small groups better the experiences for both the tourists and the local people. The local people are not ‘disturbed’ by large groups of tourists and the tourists are more able to submerge themselves temporarily in another culture. All of the reasons for ‘success’ relate to local knowledge and participation as described by both Kuuksie and Jozef. In general, academic literature supports more participation of local people in tourism. Stronza (2001: 275) indicates that there is an increase of local communities who join in partnerships

with for instance government agencies, NGO's, and private tour operators. Different actors start to work more together to plan tourism strategies and to develop new activities for visitors. This also affects the way how locals have control over how tourism influences their communities (Stronza 2001: 275) which connects precisely to the plans Kuuksie and Jozef hold for the future, as they are constantly thinking about ways to involve the people more. What could be seen is that local people are in all layers of the 'process', already since the start of the tourist resort. The resort is owned and founded by Bert and Wallytwo inhabitants of Gunsí who started with tourism in the beginning of the nineties. Revenues of tourism were among other things invested in a radio station called 'Mujee', which means woman, and a primary school. The radio station was and is with broadcasting able to create awareness about the utility of tourism amongst the people in the village. As already mentioned before, now Kuuksie is the administrator of the resort. According to him, this includes promoting the resort, processing reservations, and doing the administration. He also is responsible for the tourist facilities like the huts, toilets, kitchen, and property, which are maintained by other villagers. If tourists come without a tour operator and/or guide, Kuuksie advises them what they could do and might guide them. People from the village could organize activities like baking cassava or making typical Maroon clothes. Also boat trips and walks through the forest are possible. In the evening the band from Gunsí could perform at the campfire. More people start to come up with initiatives where they could earn money with. The people determine themselves what they offer to tourists and in that way they influence what tourists get to know about the nature and culture of the area.

As I said before, Gunsí is an exception in the tourist sector in Suriname. Although it is preferred and desired, local people are rarely involved in the decision making process. Liza Gezon (2014: 826) supports this argument by referring to different authors who have discovered that the planning is mostly in the hands of other parties, known as tour operators. This could also be seen in Suriname. During informal conversations, open interviews, and expert interviews, one general conception about local participation became clear. Namely, tourists should buy local products because that would help the local people. A high man from a booking office told me that 'they really want to help local people'. 'We can empower them by buying their products'. Many times research participants emphasized the importance of tourists buying local products. They barely spoke about involving locals more in decision making processes about the facilities or about organizing activities. This shows that there is not always an equal relationship within the collaboration between local

people and tour operators. Also, the word empowering suggests that the people might need support and/or money in the first place. However, one of the goals of participation is that local people share more in the financial profits that are made on their territory, culture, and nature. Also, that they gain more influence on what tourists do and see in their village. However, the power structures are clear in the decision making process, as tour operators and guides mostly decide what tourists do and when this is happening. Local people have to adjust to that schedule if they want to get involved. Another issue is that local people are often dependent on the tour operator, for example whether the tour operator or guide is willing to stop at their house. On the contrary, tour operators are less dependent on the local people, as they often do not directly need them to earn money. There are few opportunities for local people to get employed in tourism because often it seems that the circle is already closed. By this I mean that the whole tour is already analyzed and planned beforehand to the wishes of the tourist. This dialogue between tour operator and tourist is hard to break through, which makes it hard for local people to get involved and end up in the decision making level.

## Reflection

The first chapter, People, introduced and explained the variety of actors that are involved in the tourist sector. The chapter also shows that local people often do not profit from tourist activities equally as tour operators profit from it. Through empirical examples, I aimed to illustrate that local people are often not involved in the process of what kind of tourists come to their village and in the decision making process. Besides, there is the risk that local people will be represented in a stereotypical way, as they could adapt to the wishes of tour operators and tourists.

Through describing parts of my interviews, informal conversations, and observations on Gunsî, I showed how tourism could work out with the participation of local people in all the layers of the process, from facilitating in the resorts to the eventual decision making around tourist activities. Although, the way tourism is regulated and experienced on Gunsî is not the standard for other tourist resorts in Suriname. Compared to other tourist resorts, Gunsî is one step ahead when looking at the balance between people, planet, and profit. Participation of local people makes the power relations more equal, as decisions that have to be made about tourism are negotiated between tour operators, guides, and local people.



## **Chapter 2: Planet**

Discussing the importance of natural conservation is a beloved topic to talk about in Suriname. A sense of pride shows through the most talks I have, as the country mainly consists of untouched Amazon. ‘‘Have you already visited the interior?’’, is often one of the first questions a tourist, or other visitor of the country, is being asked. Numerous times I have been asked that question during earlier visits to Suriname, and since I study ecotourism it obviously has become the most asked question during my three months stay. The first weeks I answered properly and summed up all the places I already visited in recent years. Later on, I started to return and combine the question about tourism with nature conservation, to explore the perceptions when it comes to tourist activities and the ‘planet’. Most of the interlocutors did not see any problems with tourist activities in the Amazon as long as tourist activities would not affect the environment like leaving trash behind in the forest or harming any animals. Often the mining sector is pointed out as more polluting than tourism and therefore tourism is not seen as a threat for the Amazon such as mining is. In this chapter, I will show how the different actors in the tourist sector perceive and deal with issues concerning nature conservation. Also, I will show how common pool resources are used and perceived, and the importance of collaborations to manage the commons. I will start with zooming in on the concept of collaborations used by Anna Tsing (2005), and show how these could be translated to the collaborations in the tourist sector in Suriname.

### **Collaborations**

Collaboration is not the same as cooperation. As argued by Tsing (2005: 246), there is a different interpretation possible as ‘‘collaborators work with the enemy in wartime’’. The groups coming together in the collaboration, are not situated in equal power relations, or in sameness, as Tsing (2005: 246) names it. Furthermore, the collaboration does not produce a communal good.

Anna Tsing (2005: 246) uses the concept of collaborations in her ethnography ‘Friction’, which helped and inspired me to understand, analyze, and write down the collaborations I have seen during my fieldwork in Suriname. Tsing (2005: 246) uses collaborations to describe different groups that work together in Indonesia, however all of them have a different commitment to nature. In the Meratus Mountains of South Kalimantan, different groups are ‘‘drawn into common projects at the same time as they allow them to maintain different agenda’s’’ (Tsing 2005: 246). The collaboration succeeded, as the different groups managed to establish a forest managed by the community, which left no space for corporate destruction (Tsing 2005: 246).

A similar collaboration I found between Conservation International, tour operators, and local people in Kwamalasumutu.

### **Kwamalasumutu**

I talk with one of CI's employees who works on different projects for the organization. As I am waiting for Akaash to arrive, I get fascinated with all the posters of different projects I see in the main hall of CI's office. Posters for mercury free mining areas, protection of rain forest and posters of bright green frogs with huge eyes. Conservation International is an environmental organization that focusses on nature conservation through projects and collaborations<sup>8</sup>. Akaash walks in and we start talking about the main projects of CI. Akaash tells me that ecotourism is not one of their priorities in 2016, but in the future there might be new projects. He gives two reasons for not having ecotourism as a priority. The first one is that mining is the most important issue that has to be tackled. In his opinion, more awareness has to be created about the environmental consequences of tourism, but mining causes more damage to the forest and water so takes precedence over tourism. The second reason is that projects in ecotourism in the past were not as successful as CI hoped. Akaash tells me the stories of the two projects and the corresponding collaborations. Both the projects are also mentioned on the website of Conservation International<sup>9</sup>.

Akaash summarizes the first project in Kwamalasumutu as followed. The Trio Indians that live on the border with Brazil indicated that they to gain money through ecotourism activities. CI became enthusiastic about the initial idea, because ecotourism has the potential to protect the environment from activities such as logging and mining. Moreover, in 2000 caves were discovered with old paintings inside that could attract tourists. Thus, CI decided to invest in an ecolodge and trained local people from 2006 until 2008<sup>10</sup>. They worked together with METS and other tour operators. Everything was ready for the tourists to come to Kwamalasumutu, but the different parties involved missed something in the end. After the ecolodge was built and personnel was trained in Kwamalasumutu, few tourists visited the place because the travel towards the ecolodge is too expensive. The travel takes an internal flight, which is too expensive for most of the tourists.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://suriname.conservation.org/about-us/> Last visited on 14-8-2016.

<sup>9</sup> <http://suriname.conservation.org/history/> Last visited on 12-8-2016

<sup>10</sup> <http://suriname.conservation.org/history/> Last visited on 12-8-2016.

When analyzing the story of Akaash, it becomes visible that the different actors have different agenda's, what Tsing (2005: 246) notes as characteristic for collaborations. Conservation International carried out its work by educating local people and building a tourist lodge, whilst tour operators offer the tours to tourists on their website and via flyers. The local people would manage and facilitate the eco lodge and develop further activities for tourists. However, the different agendas all served one purpose, which was keeping mining/logging companies away from the natural environment through ecotourism. Unfortunately, the expected tourists do not come so the local people have to search for alternative ways to create income. As I hear the disappointment in the voice of Akaash, I also experience a 'next time better' feeling. For CI, an organization working on multiple projects, it was a learning experience. For tour operators it is not a big issue after all, as they still offer the tour if tourists want to go, but they are not dependent on this ecolodge as tour operators offer a large number of tours. It was a collaboration for the time being, as the different actors have no further interests to collaborate. The Trio Indians have to find alternative income generators and maybe alternative collaborations.

### **The Raleighvallen**

Another project Akaash tells me about, was the renovation of Fungu Island at the Raleighvallen that Conservation International accounted for. Akaash explains me that CI built a whole new construction on Fungu Island that should focus on educating visitors about the environment. The whole project took place from the year 2000 until 2007 and should be a model for ecotourism for the rest of the sector<sup>11</sup>. CI created new facilities and trained local people to work at the spot. After that, they wanted to outsource the island to private tour operators. Multiple parties were interested, but the government decided to install STINASU who obtained the rights to manage the place. According to Akaash, STINASU does not aim to improve the quality of the product. The educational part has totally disappeared from Fungu Island, which Akaash finds disappointing as he thinks education about the Amazon is an important part of ecotourism. Moreover, money that is earned through tourist activities, is not reinvested directly in nature conservation, which is according to him one of the core principles of ecotourism. The money goes to STINASU, who according to multiple critical research participants, especially invest in their own people and interests.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://suriname.conservation.org/history/> Last visited on 12-8-2016.



Also in this case, the complexity of collaborations and the importance of money becomes visible. Fungu Island was meant to be a model to follow for the rest of the tourist sector. A collaboration between Conservation International, private parties, local people, and STINASU that is linked to the government. Again, groups with different agenda's working together, as they need each other to reach their eventual goal. As Tsing (2005: 246) points out, the collaborators do not have equal power positions. In the case of the Raleighvallen, the government eventually decided to change the plan, which affected all the other collaborators. According to Akaash, the interested private parties dropped out and most of the educated local people did not work long on the island. As STINASU is in charge of the whole nature reserve, the progress stagnated according to several tour operators, guides, and tourism experts.

In most other collaborations in the tourist sector, the tour operator turns out to be in the best position. Tourism expert Zaar Boeddha emphasizes this by telling me that tour operators decide the where, when, what, and how of tourist activities. Other actors have to adapt to the schedule of the tour operator, as they bring the tourists, thus the money. Moreover, all the money coming from tourist activities ends on their or the lodge holder's bank account. As Stem (2003: 334) argues in her article, earnings that stem from tourism in Costa Rica, are mostly not invested in conserving nature. It is a general misconception amongst tourists and others, that money coming from (eco)tourism would be used to put in conservation projects.

The money that tourists pay for their trip goes to the tour operator in Suriname. Tour operators are mostly private businesses that decide themselves what to do with this money. Tourism is business. The first priority for tour operators is to attract more money. For a company it is important to have good marketing says Jozef Dinge, so a part of the money is invested in marketing like a website, flyers, booking offices etcetera. Sometimes, tour operators use the term 'ecotourism' in their promotion material because it could attract more tourists. It presents a company as 'responsible' for the people and planet, which is indicated by tour operators as a 'trend' amongst tourists. This connects to the argument of Wallace and Russell (2004A: 2) who also see the 'sustainability trend'. Many experts are critical towards tour operators using this trend with the knowledge that eco attracts tourists although they do not even know what eco is. Then, eco is being used as a marketing strategy just to attract tourists, instead of taken the environment and the local people into account.

### **Tour Operators and the ‘Planet’**

As the tour operator is seen as the most powerful actor in the sector, I asked how they perceive tourism and the ‘planet’, which is considered as one of the three pillars of ecotourism. Also, I asked tourism experts what they think tour operators should do concerning the environment. Concluding from my interviews and informal conversations with tour operators and tourism experts, two visions appeared. The first vision roughly contains that tour operators are responsible for everything they and the tourists leave behind. Also, educating visitors about the biodiversity within the Amazon is often part of this perception. This vision is especially shared by tour operators themselves. The second vision, from tourism experts, is more extensive and also includes the creating of awareness about the Amazon and its limits amongst tourists, and educating personnel like guides on conservation topics.

As Stem (2003: 322) argues, tour operators in Costa Rica are not raising awareness about environmental conservation amongst tourists. As I observed during trips and informal conversations, tour operators in Suriname are facilitators. They arrange everything around the tour. Think about the location where the tourists are going to sleep, the food they are going to eat, the ‘entertainment’, and the activities they will do. Though the tour operators and/or guides often have knowledge about animals and plants, they are mostly not busy with conservation. Sergio explained and taught me and the other tourists everything about the biodiversity in the area. From the trees and plants to the animals and insects that live in the area. For Sergio, protecting the Amazon is important as he considers the Raleighvallen the ‘lungs of the earth’. However, conservation projects and initiatives do according to him not belong to the tourist sector but to societal organizations and the government.

### **Supply and Demand**

After speaking with and observing tour operators, I notice the constant dialogue going on between tour operators and tourists. It is a form of supply and demand. When tourists in general do not indicate that they want to know more about how the rainforest is protected and/or conserved, the tour operators will not come up with it. Tour operators are businesses that deliver a product. That product is formed to the wishes of the client. During the trips I joined with several tour operators, both daytrips and overnight trips, I heard few tourists ask questions about for example consequences of tourism for the environment, or about how the Amazon is protected and by whom. As I joined Sergio on a trip to the Raleighvallen and the Voltzberg for four days, I had the chance to extensively observe and participate in tourist activities. As we sit by the campfire altogether in the evening, we enjoy the sounds of only

insects and frogs while looking at the stars. Since the tourists are in such an alien environment compared with their daily lives, the Amazon is a beloved topic to talk about tonight. I chat with a Belgian student who already attended more tourist trips to the interior. We talk about tourism in natural areas and I ask him if he thinks tourist activities should also focus on educating about nature conservation. His answer is pretty firm, as he tells me straight away no. He says that tourists want to enjoy the nature and relax, not always think about ‘responsible things’ because traveling is there ‘to let go’. An older woman in the group confirms this answer, by saying that she really enjoys hiking in nature and learning about animals and plants, but it does not have to be a ‘study trip’.

Obviously, perceptions on the content of tourist activities are different for each individual and/or group. However, as Stanley, the manager of a big tour operator for students mentions, Dutch and Belgian students are the main group of tourists that visit the interior of Suriname. Consequently, most tour operators focus especially on students and their families. As the competition in the tourist sector is experienced as high, the tour operators try to focus on the wishes of the tourist. The students and families are often not the ‘adventure or nature tourists’ that especially come and visit Suriname for the interior notes Stanley. If tourists would demand to learn more about the Amazon and conservation, than tour operators would arrange the tours to that desire. Stanley does see an increase in tourists who ask for a more sustainable form of tourism. He thinks this is a good development, because what could be seen is that tour operators copy tours of each other that are ‘successful’. If one tour operator offers a certain tour that is often booked, another tour operator might copy it to chase the same numbers. So, he argues, if sustainable tourism is becoming the demand of the tourists, soon all tour operators would follow. The copy model becomes clear to me when I walk into the Tourist Information Centre after I interviewed Stanley. I start to randomly pick flyers and observe them. After ten minutes or so, I realize that I have already seen more than four flyers from different tour operators that organize an overnight trip to Brownsberg and the Brokopondo Lake. All the tours consist of the same activities, though some might have a slightly different twist to the program. Hiking, swimming, a boat trip, a Surinamese dinner, and sleeping with a nice view over the lake are fixed components of the trip. Copying products obviously saves money that would be spent on product development. Also, as tourism expert Zaar points out, copying products is easy for starting ‘tour operators’ as they do not have to come up with a whole new product. The consequence Zaar argues, is that there is little innovation to be seen within the products.

In short, tour operators are in general not the actor within the sector that is likely to raise awareness, or to work on issues concerning nature conservation. This does not mean that tour operators do not think it is important, or are not willing to take responsibility for the Amazon. Many tour operators say that through tourism they do contribute to conservation as they 'reserve' areas for tourist activities. Areas that are frequently visited by tourists are not used for instance for goldmining because then the surroundings would look bad and harm the 'Amazon experience' of the tourist<sup>12</sup>. Sergio sees it as a form of 'occupying' the Amazon, to prevent it from being damaged by big mining or logging companies. Furthermore, he sees ecotourism as one of the future alternatives for gold mining, which would eventually contribute to conservation of the Amazon.

Sergio argues that tour operators are responsible for everything that happens during a trip, what tourists do and what is left behind. For instance he mentions responsibility for proper waste disposal, which is mentioned by almost all tour operators as of great importance. Sergio mentions that organic trash will be thrown in the river during and after the tour, and other waste will be taken back to the city. When I interviewed tourism expert Zaar Boeddha, he reacted critical towards all the plastic and other materials used during tourist activities. According to him, tour operators make it look like they are busy with caring for the planet, whilst in reality a lot of waste is generated during overnight trips. I have to admit I was overwhelmed by the enormous amount of packed products we brought in the van and boat towards the Raleighvallen. To illustrate, on the second day we hiked towards the Voltzberg with about twelve persons. Every person had to bring two big plastic bottles of water (1,5 liter) and four small ones (0,5 liter) to be able to complete the hike. Four days of using disposable plastic cups and cutlery results in a huge amount of waste that has to be processed. Some tour operators already work with handing tourists one bottle for the whole trip that they should refill. When Jozef carries out a trip to Gunsí, he gives the tourists one bottle for three days. According to own terms, he is done with the excessive use of PET bottles and he also installed a bin for PET bottles in the village to start with the separation of waste. However, although the disposable plastic used during the tourist activities in the Raleighvallen could be replaced by reusable substitutes, when making a long hike, multiple bottles are needed as there are no water taps on the way to the top of the Voltzberg. As STINASU is the administrating organization for the nature reserve, they should according to Sergio take responsibility for the area. However, as

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<sup>12</sup> The national economy of Suriname is dependent on the mining sector (Van Dijck 2001: 13), where I will elaborate on in chapter three.

argued above by Akaash from Conservation International, STINASU is not focusing on improving eco facilities.

### **Common Pool Resources**

Most of my research participants indicated during interviews or tourist activities that they did not view tourism as a threat or potential threat to the Amazon. An often mentioned reason is that the mining sector is seen as a direct danger for the Amazon. However, because there is another bigger threat, does not mean that tourism does not affect the environment. Even ecotourism could not be seen as a ‘non-consumptive’ use of resources as Stem (2003: 344) argues: “under ideal circumstances, ecotourism may be less consumptive than other available alternatives, but it is important to critically examine both its costs and benefits”.

Natural areas like the Amazon, are put under pressure because of tourist activities. As Well-Beloved Stone (2014: 40) argues, every form of tourism affects the environment because the tourists make use of natural resources. There has to be infrastructure to transport the tourists and there have to be accommodations suitable for tourists within the natural regions. In a nutshell, Well-Beloved Stone (2014) tries to clarify that tourists leave a footprint no matter how ‘eco’ the tourist activities might be. Moreover, an increase of tourists also means more waste generation and erosion of trails (Stem et al. 2003: 322). Jozef supports the argument of Well-Beloved Stone when he describes the, according to him, unrealistic images tourists hold about ‘ecotourism’. Tourists complain about the non-sustainable bus towards the river and after that, about the boat with an outboard motor. However, when the tourists are in the forest, they wonder if an ambulance could pick them up if something happens. It is a twofold situation according to Jozef, because on the one hand, tourists want to be good for the environment and travel in a sustainable way. On the other hand, they want to have guarantees about their safety and transport should be available everywhere in the Amazon.

On the same note, Stronza (2010: 57) writes about common pool resources that are commodified because of tourist activities. Common pool resources are for example wildlife, landscapes, and forests. These commons would become more difficult to manage because of tourist activities when the numbers of users of the commons increases. Thereby, the manner in which the commons are used and perceived, might shift. As Stronza (2010: 57) argues, the commons are no longer the domain of local needs and practices because they enter the imaginations of others. The ‘others’ are NGO’s, tourists, tour operators, environmentalists

etcetera. More 'users' of the commons makes the management more complex (Stronza 2010: 57). Therefore, the commons that once were local could shift to global commons.

However, one important point needs to be highlighted, as the transition from local to global is not as black and white as it is described by Stronza (2010). The Amazon, in particular Suriname where I write about, has not solely been a local common before the tourist sector started to actively participate in it. Namely, since 1651 until 1975, Suriname was colonized by white settlers (Buddingh' 1999: 12). The Englishmen were the first to start a colony in Suriname but during the Second English War in 1667, Suriname was taken over by the Dutch (Buddingh' 1999: 12). Next to the Englishmen and the Dutch, there were also Jewish diaspora who settled in Suriname. The Jewish lived relatively free under the colonial authorities and were able to establish their own plantations and hold slaves (Buddingh' 1999: 53-57). During the colonial period, the local commons were not as local as described by Stronza (2010), as people from outside the country came and started using the commons as well. The rivers were for instance used for traffic and transport of humans and merchandise. At that point, the local commons already were shifted into global ones. Same goes for the forest, that was cleared and used for plantations, logging, mining, and other business. Therefore, when I write about local and global commons, it has to be kept in mind that the local commons were not always totally local.

For instance, the Boven-Suriname River could be seen as a local common how Stronza (2010) describes it that shifted towards a global one. As I argued above, the river has not been a local common for centuries, but if we only look at 'tourism terms' than it was. As Jozef mentions during our interview, the river is the infrastructure for Maroon people. Also daily activities like fishing, washing, and bathing often takes place at the riverbank. Since tourists started to visit the area, the river is also used by tourist businesses for transport and recreation. Tourist activities often take place on the river, for example swimming and spotting of animals. Same goes for the forest where Maroon people cultivate crops, hunt, log, etcetera. Tour operators enter these resources by hiking and sleeping in the forest with tourists. As the number of parties using the common pool resources expands, Stronza argues (2010: 58) that the management of the resources becomes more complex. By opening up these common pool resources to for example tour operators and tourists, problems with exclusion and controlling access could arise. When I visited the small village Wageningen, that is located in the northwest of Suriname, for a private occasion, I met a guy who goes hunting on a regular basis. He told me that because of tourist groups he has to go further into the forest to hunt because the tourists disturb the natural environment for the animals. Although he encourages tourists to visit the

area, the management issues that could occur as described by Stronza (2010: 58) become visible here. As tour operators enter the local common with tourists, the forest then becomes a globalized common with multiple actors where exclusion could take place. The man who goes hunting in the area where he lives is compelled to go hunting further in the forest and walk longer. Thus, he is excluded from his previous hunting ground. This also brings questions about the control of the resource. The forest is not 'owned' by people, which makes it hard to demarcate areas for both tour operators to carry out their trips and for local people and their daily activities. Who has the 'right' to go in which area? The importance of local participation, as also extensively described in chapter one, then becomes clear. Collaborations between the different actors who make use of the commons, are needful to come towards a shared agreement and an overall shared management of the common.

Next problem that is also emphasized by Stronza (2010: 58) is that the increasing number of users and at the same time increasing revenues for new technologies, could bring about conditions that speed up subtraction. When people start to earn income because of ecotourism in the area, that money will be invested often to expand the business. A friend of mine named Don calls himself a starting tour operator. Don is twenty-three years old and searching for a way to start his own business. He grew up in the upper Suriname area but for higher education and work he had to go to Paramaribo. Many people around him are already running a successful tour business he says, and he got interested by both the social and financial side of tourism. "Meeting a lot of people from all over the world seems fantastic to me in combination with earning a lot of money. Besides, it gives me a chance to go back to the interior, thus to see my family, more often." He and his friends build a few tourist huts near a small village where his family lives next to the Suriname River. They will start with small groups of tourists to see if it will be a success. The tour is going to look similar to the tours going to the Amazon that are already set up by other tour operators. If they will succeed, Don told me they are going to build more lodges and then they will invite bigger groups.

Consequently, more lodges and tourists means that more weight is put on the planet, as more tourists start to make use of the commons. If the tourist sector grows, the amount of users within the commons increases, which requires collaborations for adequate management of these commons to prevent possible conflict between the different users. Agreements should be made between and within the different parties that make use of the natural resources otherwise, besides possible conflicts, also the danger of too much extraction and/or pollution within the commons could appear. When the amount of tourists will increase in Suriname, there will be



more people making use of the natural resource like the river and the forest. It could be imaginable that tourists might disrupt daily activities for the local people by making use of the water and searching for animals. Also, more pollution of the water and forest could occur as there are little to no agreements about the processing of waste. The commons are spaces used by different actors, nearly without regulation or legislation about the use of it.

### **Collaborations**

To prevent conflicting situations that could occur like exclusion and problems with controlling the commons amongst the different actors, collaborations are of importance. Collaborations between tour operators, lodge holders, local people, societal organizations, and the state, to make sure that natural resources and the ways people live could remain undisturbed. In the end, it will be beneficial for all actors that the tourist sector in Suriname flourishes in a sustainable way. For instance, although tour businesses aim to profit from tourist activities in the Amazon, whilst societal organizations have the priority to protect the environment, eventually it would be beneficial for both the actors that the sector runs in an ecofriendly way. Ecotourism has the potential to attract more tourists and thus more money for the state, tour operators and lodge holders because it connects to the ‘worldwide trend’ of sustainability where Wallace and Russell (2004: 2) write about. Societal organizations want tourism to be less polluting and exploitative which makes them supportive towards the development of a form of tourism where the planet is taken into account. Furthermore, one of the pillars of ecotourism aims to enhance the participation of local people, which makes it able for them to get involved more in decision making levels. The argumentation above might suggest a fluent collaboration, as all the actors could benefit from each other when working towards a sustainable sector. However, in practice it turns out to be complex and amongst the actors power inequalities are noticeable.

Often I heard tour operators, guides, tourists, and experts as policy makers, say during interviews that local people are always willing to collaborate in tourism, as long as they earn money from the tourists. Most of my research participants spoke firmly about that and were convinced that local people would become motivated by financial rewards. Then, it would also be less complex to manage the commons as (financial) agreements could be made about for instance separate area’s in the forest for local people to go hunting and logging, and other area’s for recreational tourist activities. Tourists would still be able to see ‘pure’ wildlife and that part of the Amazon would be ‘conserved’ because of ecotourism. However, Stronza (2010: 70) indicates that despite economic motives to promote ecotourism by conserving the planet, local people often break rules that are made. For instance, Stronza (2010: 70) writes about an

indigenous village in the Peruvian Amazon, where hunters chase wildlife next to the tourist lodges, despite they made the agreement to not hunt near the lodges. One actor that does not stick to the agreement, might show that there is not complete consensus about the agreement. These findings might also suggest that only financial rewards are not enough to regulate and manage the commons. What I have seen and heard from local people, is that obviously money is an important incentive to participate in tourism, but there are more reasons viewed as equally important. The woman I spoke with at Brownsweg said that if she could, she would want to have influence on what tourists do and where they are accommodated. The reason for that is she wants to know when people might stop at her house. Money is not the only motive, as tourism could be an infringement on people's privacy. Kuuksie, the administrator of the tourist resort on Gunsi, supports this observation by saying that local people do not want to be disturbed in their daily lives by tourists stepping randomly into their houses. That is why there are on Gunsi clear agreements between local people and guides/tour operators when and if tourists are allowed to walk through the village with or without accompaniment of a guide. The success of the collaboration is ascribed by Kuuksie and Jozef to the constant communication between local people and people that organize and carry out tourist activities.

Another example of a collaboration between a tour operator and local people illustrates mutual incomprehension that might occur. The director of a big touring agency shows by describing a practical example he experienced that there are also different ways of thinking and communicating between actors, which makes it difficult to come to concrete agreements. The director explains that the tour business came up with the idea of rings and additional plastic bags in public spaces in Moengo, where people from the village in northeastern Suriname could throw their waste in. The waste could be thrown in the rings and would prevent the streets and natural areas from being polluted. After a while the tour operator empties the bags and transports the waste to the dump in Paramaribo. Thus, the tour operator placed the rings, but after a while they found out that the rings were being used for basketball in the village instead of throwing away waste. According to the director this is mainly a 'cultural' problem because 'they', by which he means Maroon people, do not want to understand that they have to use the rings to keep the village clean although the village is informed through flyers and educational lessons. The above-mentioned situation shows an example of mutual incomprehension and an unequal power relation between different actors in the tourist sector. A tour operator comes up with a measure to protect the environment to come closer to the eco goals of his business. By implementing and introducing the measure it becomes clear that the other actor is not fully

informed or agreed, as the effect of the measure turns out insufficient. The judgement that it is a ‘cultural’ problem suggests a feeling of superiority from the tour operator towards local people. The collaboration is not based on equivalence, which makes it more complex to make agreements as one actor is in the decision-level, whilst the other has to implement it without knowing precisely how and why.

### **Reflection**

This chapter showed both perceptions and practices of the environmental side of ecotourism. Through translating Tsing’s concept of collaborations to the collaborations within the tourist sector in Suriname, I illustrated how different actors work together and what kind of power relations exist. As tour operators are seen as the most powerful actors in the sector, I elaborated on their perceptions of tourism and nature, and nature conservation through tourism.

I argued that tourism, whether it is eco or not, always has impact on the environment. Through explaining the concept of common pool resources, it could be seen how commons could shift and used differently because of tourist activities. Again, collaborations to manage these commons is necessary. Ecotourism might provide the ‘right economic incentives and social conditions to strengthen collective management of resources’ (Stronza 2010: 58). It has the potential to bring different actors closer together as this form of tourism is focused on more involvement for local people and taking the planet into account.

As money is considered one of the greatest motives by research participants to work in tourism, the need is there to dive deeper into the Wild West sector of Suriname, as it is called by many research participants. The final chapter, Profit, will explore the lack of legislation in the sector and other practices that contribute to the Wild West situation.

## Chapter 3: Profit

### Frontier

Tsing (2005) conceptualizes frontiers to analyze the situation in Indonesia where big logging companies exploit the natural resources in South Kalimantan and infringe the lives of Meratus people. As Tsing (2005: 32) explains, “frontiers are not places or processes, but imaginative projects capable of molding both places and processes”. Frontiers are complex, as they do not pop up in a predictable way.

The frontier is not a philosophy but rather a series of historically nonlinear leaps and skirmishes that come together to create their own intensification and proliferation (Tsing 2005: 33).

The Amazon in Suriname is an open space where different actors from the tourist sector dive into, in a search towards resources combined with a mindset that is focused on using these resources. In this frontier, there are no rules about what is legal or illegal. Tour operators do not need a license to start working, and there is no legislation about tourist activities in the Amazon. When I sit at the ministry of Transport, Communication, and Tourism, I ask the civil servant about rules for tourism activities in the interior. As an answer, I am handed different guidelines. Guidelines made by the Tourism Foundation Suriname for tourists and for tour operators how to interact with local people. The guidelines do not even come close to official rules or laws, as it indicates do's and don'ts for tourists and tour operators. As Tsing (2005: 28) states “a frontier is an edge of space and time: a zone of not yet, not yet mapped, not yet regulated”. The Amazon has no clear demarcation about what is public or what is private, and this space in confusion makes it possible that resources could get extracted.

Tour operators and other interested parties are exploring the area, to see where they could start tourist activities. As I walk through Wageningen during a free weekend, I meet two young guys who are building a future lodge for tourists. The encounter is no coincidence, as a woman from the village told me this afternoon that there are guys working on a tourist lodge at the riverside. My curiosity lures me to the place, where they tell me they have plans to organize trips into the interior. In this stage of their project, they are searching in the forests for good spots to hike and sleep with tourists. They could basically pick every spot in the forest, as nobody would probably notice them and if, there is nobody who could prohibit them. Natural resources such as the forest and the river, are seen as opportunities to make money. Within the frontier, a kind of atmosphere is build where money is prioritized over the planet and the people. Tsing (2005:

27) explains that “frontiers are not just edges; they are particular kinds of edges where the expansive nature of extraction comes into its own”. I am not saying that the guys I encounter have plans to exploit natural resources, but it does illustrate the lawless situation, as unexperienced men could start a tour business at a random location in the Amazon. There is no controlling or supervision. Furthermore, tourist businesses might enter the territory of local people and use it for activities, which could be an infringement into the private lives of local people. As argued in chapter one, often local people do not share in the profits of tourism nor have a say in the planning and decision making concerning tourist activities.

My goal in this chapter, is to translate the conceptualization of frontier that Tsing (2005) uses in her ethnography ‘Friction’, to the situation in Suriname, where the tourist sector is also known as ‘the Wild West sector’. The profits, in terms of money, are important motives for people to work in tourism, as fast and foreign money could be earned. In brief, the sector knows a lot of unregistered tour operators, which are often referred to as hustlers. This shows similarities with the mining sector that also consists of both a formal and informal side. However, also registered tour operators often prioritize profit over people and the environment, as extensively described in the previous chapters.

Another important component of this chapter, is the position of the government, as all the other actors point their finger at the government for the lack of legislation and the lack of investment in the sector. The government indicates that they want to invest in sustainable tourism to make the tourist sector an important pillar of the national economy. However, as I will exemplify, there is no budget for tourism. Moreover, it is said by many research participants that the government is already calling for years that they will invest in the sector, but up until now little investment has been made.

### *Hosselen*

In Suriname, *hosselen* (hustling) is a common phenomenon. I ask one of my Surinamese friends Revi, what *hosselen* actually is. The answer is “anything that makes fast money, but maybe not always in the proper way. Look at the gold diggers, they are *hosselaars* (hustlers)”. Since the independence of Suriname in 1975, the national economy started to focus on expanding the gold, bauxite, and oil sector (Van Dijck 2001: 13). The mining industry consists of a few big companies that make up a large part of the national economy. Next to the legal sector, there is a huge illegal sector that is not included in the official statistics (Van Dijck 2001: 14). Many, often young men, are workable in illegal gold mining. As my friend Revi says, gold and

especially the chance of finding a lot of gold, attracts young men because they are able to make fast money. Besides, the gold mostly gets exchanged into dollars that are of more value than the Surinamese dollar. The informal sector increased thoroughly in Suriname after the economic and political instability of the eighties and nineties. Pitou van Dijck (2001: 17) describes that next to illegal goldmining, the informal sector also consists of ‘unregistered activities’ in trade, manufacturing and agriculture.

To this list, the tourist sector could be added as well. Namely, an unknown part of the tour operators is not registered as tour operator, which results in a less transparent sector as for example earnings from tourist activities are not processed in statistics. The lack of regulation creates possibilities for people to start and work as a ‘qualified’ tour operator to earn fast money, whilst they do not have any experience or license. As Revi and I discuss similarities between the mining sector and the tourist sector that are both described as hustle cultures, we find two similarities. The first similarity is that both sectors mainly consist of men. In tourism, men are predominant in contrast to women. All the guides and tour operators I spoke with are men. The mining sector is also mostly a men’s world. The second similarity, is the attractive power of foreign money that could be seen in both sectors. Gold could be exchanged in dollars or euros and tourists pay tour operators in dollars or euros as well.

### **The Wild West Sector**

As Sergio describes during one of our conversations, the tourist sector fell victim to people who search for fast money. Many research participants gave the sector the nickname ‘Wild West’ when describing the same phenomenon as Sergio mentions.

So what tourism concerns, the sector is totally confused. Right now we have even more of a *hosselcultuur* in the country. The whole country is not educated on the eco part. People want to make money instead of conserving and building the country.

### **The Dolphin Trip**

The dolphin trip is the perfect example to illustrate how tour operators work, or *hossel*, in the Wild West sector. Countless tour operators offer a dolphin trip for tourists to go on a boat for a few hours and search for dolphins. During the trip the tourists might stop at a former plantation that was owned by white settlers, or at any other place the tourist wishes to stop. These dolphin trips leave every day from the same place at Leonsberg, Paramaribo. The tour operators all ask about the same prices and deliver exactly the same product. Baba, tour guide for different tour operators, says he fears for the wellbeing of the dolphins because every day

boats are chasing for dolphins. The dolphins are then disturbed from their natural behavior. When boats keep distance, it is no problem and often dolphins are curious to swim next to the boat so then it is no problem as well. However, it becomes a problem when the boats are chasing animals that try to get away from the spot. According to Baba, tour operators place the wishes of the tourist to come as close as possible to the animals above the wellbeing of the animal. Not only dolphin trips are known for that, the same goes for caimans and sea turtles. The spotting of caimans and sea turtles are big businesses as well. Baba says he always tries to be careful when approaching animals but he mentions that larger companies do, in practice, not care so much about animal wellbeing. Most important is that they could give a guarantee for tourists that they will see the animals. In the battle for tourists, tour operators focus on the wishes of tourists and lose sight of animal wellbeing.

Sergio also wonders about tour operators that copy tours from each other. He questions why everyone comes and copies the same tours from tour operators that already exist like the dolphin tour. ‘‘So, than I am wondering, are you doing it for euros? Or are you trying to find a girl because of her nationality?’’ As he explains later on during our conversation, the dolphin tour is in the sector seen as successful and easy to organize as the only thing in need is a boat and some drinks and snacks. Besides, dolphins show up often and the trip takes just a few hours. Money could be earned fast. The tour is popular amongst tourists, as almost every tourist and/or student I have spoken with joined the trip one or even multiple times. The feasibility of organizing the tour also attracts people who own a boat at or near Leonsberg. They ask a better price and practically copy the tour of other tour operators. However, Baba says that they do not have any skill or experience in tourism. Bad experiences would not surprise him. This is also what research participants refer to when describing the hustling, or the ‘Wild West’ situation. Anybody could carry out tourist activities to earn some fast money.

### **Meeting the *hosselaar***

My first encounter with a *hosselaar* occurred rather unexpectedly in one of the first weeks of my fieldwork. Below, I described our dialogue.

*This morning, I had to leave early to get my passport stamped, so I called a taxi to pick me up. Within a few minutes the yellow car stopped in front of the complex where I live. As soon as I get in the car the driver starts firing his questions. ‘What are you doing here? How long will you stay? Have you already seen the interior? I like your blonde hair’. The man, middle age, with short black spines looks at me curiously. When I tell him that I study ecotourism he smiles*



*at me and after that urges me to stop talking. "Girl I am so happy that you are here. You are coming with me. I am a tour operator. No, I am a taxi driver, a cook, and a tour operator. I work multiple jobs to take care of my kids. Prices of food and electricity are raising and my salary does not. Earn some extra money you know. For 150 Surinamese dollar I will drive you and your friends to Colakreek [recreational water], guide you during the day, and bring you back home. I have experience in tourism and then you can do your research. That sounds good for me?" I tell the man that I am more interested in tours going to the interior and that is no problem at all, because one of his friends has a boat and he could bring us all over the Suriname River towards different villages where we could sleep at his family's house. When we arrive at the destination, he keeps talking for more than ten minutes enthusiastically before I am allowed to leave the car. He gives me his number and asks me to pass it forwards to all my friends. When I close the door I realize, that this must be a hosselaar where my research participants constantly talk about. I have to admit, the hosselaar seems nicer than he is talked about by most of my other research participants.*

The main reason that is indicated by my research participants for the growth of the 'Wild West' sector, is the lack of legislation set by the government. The absence of legislation in the sector, makes it attractive for a lot of people to start a business in tourism. Especially in times when the financial situation in the country is uncertain, people start to look for alternative ways to earn money. The tourist sector is attractive because it is easy accessible. No education or license is needed to start as a tour operator. Also, it is a job that could be combined with other work as it is a 'flexible' way to earn money. The taxi driver I met illustrates this by saying that he is cook, a taxi driver, and a tour operator. Maybe even more important, is that the tourist sector deals with foreign currency. Tourist activities are mostly paid with euros and dollars. Foreign currencies are worth a lot in contrast to the Surinamese dollar. The rates of exchange are unpredictable and rising fast. To illustrate, in 2015 one euro stood for approximately 4.2 Surinamese dollar. One year later in February 2016, one euro stood for at least 6 Surinamese dollar and on the black market there were even days when people bought euros for 8 Surinamese dollar each. In a few months, the Surinamese dollar dropped and devaluated, whilst many people have to pay for example rent, cars, and fridges in euros or dollars. People that earn money in euro or dollar are lucky because at least the worth of their money is guaranteed.

### **The Tourism Law**

As stressed already multiple times before in this thesis, the tourist sector lacks legislation when it comes to starting as a tour operator and to protect the natural resources in the Amazon from

being exploited. In fact, almost all of the research participants indicate that they are waiting for the tourism law to come up. No regulation in the sector makes it easy for people to misuse and freely interpret the lawlessness, which could be disadvantageous for people and planet. As an employee of a big tour operator tells me strikingly, the Wild West sector flourishes by the (non) policy of the Surinamese government. Stem (2003: 229) adds to this statement by saying her research participants generally agreed that legal restrictions were, next to raising environmental awareness, identified as the most influential factor in deterring the destruction of the environment.

The director of the Suriname Tourism Foundation (STS), which is the executive body of the ministry of Transport, Communication, and Tourism, confirms that the Wild West situation needs to be dealt with through legislation. During our interview in his office, the director tells me that there is a law in the making to tackle the Wild West practices. The upcoming rules involve preconditions and requirements for booking agents and tour operators in Suriname.

The chairman of the Suriname Hospitality and Tourism Training Centre SHTTC also believes in this tourism law and says it is not going to take long, approximately one year, before the tourism law will be installed. He told me this in the beginning of the political and financial crisis in April 2016, so the installing of the law will probably be deferred as the situation in the country is getting worse since I interviewed him. After the law is installed and there is a label for quality products, he believes that tourists have a good tool to see whether a tour operator is qualified to carry out tours. Then, unqualified tour operators and guides would be a problem of the past. The chairman hands me a copy of the first edition of the national standard for booking agents and tour operators in Suriname, which is already finished since 2014. In chapter four of the upcoming national standard, the long expected and demanded law is written down:

4.1 The responsibilities of the tour operator are taking care of the safety of the tourists by making sure that:
1. transport is safe
2. Hygienic and safe surroundings ensured on location
3. Compliance to the standards of food safety
4. Personnel is qualified
5. Sufficient and qualitative good safety equipment

Then, the part of the law where the whole sector is waiting for:

4.3 The tour operator has to make sure he or she is a recognized business by complying with all legal requirements.

These requirements involve for example transparency of earnings and qualified personnel, but also insurances for tourists and safety preconditions.

The director of STS explains to me that the next challenge then is the controlling of the law. According to own terms, STS would be able to fulfill the monitoring role. That means the organization will be strengthened. He thinks that besides a quality label that should be introduced, also ad random surveillance should take place, as people might say they stick to the rules but actually they do not.

In Sergio's opinion, this sounds not realistic at all. He argues that the Wild West sector is grown into the regular sector and sees it as a part of the Surinamese culture. Moreover, it would be complex to control tour operators in practice that are nowhere to be found in statistics or other registers. Sergio sees it as a matter of time, where education for tour operators and other personnel on ecotourism would be more effective to change the sector.

### **The Government and Sustainable Tourism**

In his inauguration speech in 2015, president Bouterse announced to approach tourism in a way that it would become a sustainable factor for the Bruto National Product<sup>13</sup>. The department of tourism holds the vision that no other form for the development of tourism should be pursued than the 'sustainable form'. One of their statements contains the worldwide increase of awareness of the environment and as a result of that, the increasing interest for nature and ecotourism. In the vision of the government, it is said that through globalization, more people are interested in foreign cultures and places in the world<sup>14</sup>. Thus, the government is planning on developing a sustainable form of tourism, which they call ecotourism, with the eventual accessory goal of economic profit. The tourism policy of the Surinamese government is focused on increasing state income but also on the wellbeing and quality of life of the Surinamese society in general and in particular of the local communities. The goal is to promote

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.gov.sr/media/3045316/inauguratie-president-12-aug-2015.pdf> Last accessed on 30-1-2016.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.mintct.sr/beleid.htm> Last accessed on 30-1-2016

Suriname as a sustainable tourist destination which will lead to a steady but sustainable growth of the number of tourists.

As I discussed the stance of the government with all the people I interviewed, I slowly started to realize that the announcements and statements from the government about sustainable tourism, were not as promising as I thought beforehand. To illustrate, some of my research participants started laughing when I told them the new vision on tourism from the government. Others reacted ironically, by saying ‘well is it finally going to happen’? Most of them just nodded their head, as a statement of this is not going to happen. As a last spark of hope, I decided to visit multiple governmental departments to speak with people involved, or closely involved, with the policy concerning tourism. After speaking with a civil servant and a policy maker on the ministry of Transport, Communication, and Tourism, I understood the reactions of my other research participants. During the interviews they told me that tourism does not have a priority at all, and especially not in times when the state treasury appears to be empty. Also, the civil servant mentioned that only few people are known in the field of sustainable tourism, which does not help the further process of working towards a sustainable form of tourism.

The marketing manager of STS, who is in charge of the money coming from the government for tourism, says that the budget they receive is not even a tiny part of what they actually need. As constant announcements come from the government about investments in tourism, she still has not seen any of the money that is promised. The director of STS says that the government only thinks on the short term, whilst the tourists sector needs long term investments.

How will ‘investing in a sustainable way’ look like on short term? We want to operate on the long term but the government wants short term. I do not want to focus on short projects. I want to influence the public opinion. Then, the mass will bend and support you to eventually bring the government to other thoughts. The mass is important to communicate the message.

Stronza (2001: 275) implicates that the aim for profit mostly overshadows the aim for sustainability. This statement is confirmed by tourism expert Sven, who says that the government obviously puts money over sustainability.

## Reflection

This chapter aimed to highlight the importance of profit in the tourist sector for different actors. For instance for hosselaars in the sector, also known as unregistered tour operators, it is a way of making a living. However, also regular tour operators hold economic motives, as the goal of their businesses is to expand and make money. Next to the tour operators, also the government aims to earn money through tourism. Financial motives could be found everywhere. I used the frontier concept of Tsing (2005) and the empirical examples of the Wild West sector to illustrate the economic argument on a more abstract level.

## Coda

‘‘It is a blessing, living in a country with green gold’’, said Sergio when I spoke with him for the first time. This saying could be interpreted in multiple ways when reading it on paper. What he means, is that he feels the privilege he has, by making a living through showing people the Amazon. Green gold, is a symbolic reference to the mining sector, which he loathes as it threatens the existence of a large part of the Amazon in Suriname. Green gold, is him making money out of nature without harming it. For what Sergio concerns, Suriname could be a country completely dependent on ecotourism and agriculture.

For many people I encountered during my fieldwork, ecotourism was a sort of Holy Grail. A perfect picture, which would solve all the issues faced in contemporary tourist practices in Suriname. If the tourist sector would be completely eco, there would be no problems with waste processing, harming of animals, exclusion of local people, etcetera. In other words, as Wallace and Russell (2004: 1) argue, ecotourism is seen as a ‘problem solving’ concept. As an alternative for mass tourism, which is environmental friendly and includes local people more in tourism.

However, as scientists like Well-Beloved Stone and Stronza argue, every form of tourism has impact and tourism in the Amazon changes the way common pool resources are perceived and used. It should also not be underestimated that tourism is often financially motivated, as the focus is especially placed on getting money out of it. The tour operators are companies and the government sees the tourist sector as one of the future solutions to cover the holes in the budget. The glorifying of the term ecotourism by all actors, legitimizes the choice for enlarging the sector. Enlarging the sector would, although completely eco, have impact and leave footprint.

For future research, I think it would be relevant to focus more on the economic side of ecotourism. In academic literature, little attention is given for economic motives of the different actors to work in tourism. Anthropologists often focus on local communities, and environmentalists often address natural resources. What I have seen, is that money is the thread that runs through all facets in the tourist sector. As some actors earn more money through tourism than others, unequal power relations could be exposed within collaborations. The three pillars of sustainability (and the names of my chapters) People, Planet, and Profit, are not in balance, as the profit side is often perceived and practiced as more important. This becomes especially clear when looking at the participation, or non-participation, of local people in tourist activities. Anthropologists are in my opinion very much suitable for this type of research, as

they often are capable to switch from their idealist attitude towards a critical position, without losing track of wanting to contribute something for other people.



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## **Appendix I**

### **List of Organizations**

- Conservation International (CI)
- Suriname Hospitality and Tourism Training Centre (SHTTC)
- World Wildlife Fund (WWF)
- Foundation Conservation Suriname (STINASU)
- National Institute for Environment and Development in Suriname (NIMOS)
- The Association of Surinamese Tour Operators (VESTOR)

### **List of tour operators**

- Myrysji Tours
- Tour of Paradise (TOPS)
- Jozef Eco Tours
- SU4You

### **List of governmental departments**

- Ministry of Transport, Communication, and Tourism
- Suriname Tourism Foundation (STS)

## **Appendix II**

### **List of Figures**

Figure 1: Map of Suriname

Figure 2: Tourist Hotspots in my Research

Figure 3: The Actors