

The meaning and discourse of ethical consumption and production in fair trade tourism

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Abstract

This thesis investigates a new and sustainable approach to tourism; Fair Trade Tourism (FTT). FTT emerged as a mechanism to not only foster the sustainable operation of tourism businesses, but to also significantly attend to Pro-Poor Tourism (PPT) strategies. Fair Trade Tourism South Africa (FTTSA) is a certification programme that emerged in 2002. It is equally focused on the social, environmental and economic conduct of businesses. In comparison to the many other tourism approaches FTTSA's distinction is that it is a certification. It provides a clear framework for implementation, evaluation and review. Such a certification in the context of post-apartheid South Africa facilitates improved conditions contributing to positive on-going transformation and creates conditions for the practice of a fairer tourism.

The aim of this study is to investigate the consumption and production of FTT from the perspective of two informant groups, consumers and producers. The study investigates the following research questions: How do tourism consumers perceive fair trade and what is their level of involvement in ethical consumption? What was the motivation for FTTSA members to apply for FTTSA certification? Three objectives support the aim of this study: to explore consumers' and producers' understanding of the concept of ethical consumption as it relates to fair trade and FTTSA; to explore the discourses that inform the production and consumption of FTT in South Africa; to explore FTT in the context of a consumer's wider ethical consumptive behaviour.

The study utilizes two methods; namely Heuristic Inquiry (HI) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). HI was used to guide the collection of the data and create a binary focus on both the researcher and the informant groups. As such I tracked my personal experiences and utilized a reflective approach to illustrate how my thought processes changed throughout the investigation and time spent in the field. CDA was used to analyse the data collected and reveal the multi-layers inherent in informants' discourse. Specifically, the use of CDA elicited three forms of constructions that influence informants' discourses such as subject positions, linguistic repertoires and alternative subject positions. Data collection took place in South Africa over two phases. This research is concerned with the value associated with FTTSA membership from the perspective of tour operators and traveller's awareness of FTTSA, and their involvement in ethical consumption.

Fundamentally, the research found that consumers had a good understanding of fair trade and they participated in ethical consumption back home, although, consumers had no prior knowledge of FTTSA before arriving in South Africa. Therefore, consumer fair trade awareness did not influence their consumptive behaviour while in South Africa. FTTSA members were interested in membership based on the opportunities the certification process provided to improve their businesses and create tangible benchmarks to ensure their social progress. Although informant groups demonstrated virtuous and collective interests, at times they contradicted such social concerns.

The presentation of the data in the analysis chapters takes the form of two interpretations. Informants' subject positions or micro discourses reveal their merits regarding their concerns and actively make contributions to their communities. A re-interpretation of the data identified some of the socio-cultural influences which affected informants' language and consequently contradicted their exemplary micro positions creating tensions. Producers' macro discourses illustrated soft paternalistic tendencies which may have been a consequence of their colonial guilt. Sometimes consumers demonstrated a moral high ground in some of their behaviours based on their level of education and specific lifestyle choices. Furthermore, they may have been concerned with demonstrating their ethical selves. Both producers' and consumers' macro discourses revealed a neo-colonial perspective based on their capitalist conditioning. Such macro discourses also influenced my discourse and this is discussed throughout the analysis chapters. Inherent contradictions in informants' discourses demonstrate the intricate meanings and various motivations for tour operators' interests in taking up FTSA certification and consumers' participation in ethical consumption.

Key Words: Fair Trade Tourism, Fair Trade Tourism South Africa, Ethical Consumption, Social Entrepreneurship, Critical Discourse Analysis, Heuristic Inquiry.