Have we arrived yet?

Ecotourism operators managing dilemmas in Sweden

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Abstract

The concern for the environment and social aspects have been highlighting in the concept of ecotourism. Tourism is a growing industry, where ecotourism is one of the fastest growing components in tourism today. The increase of amount of travels and tourists in the world, has led to the acknowledgement of tourism as part of the emissions of greenhouse gases. Therefore, the framework of sustainable development in tourism has been developed as well as ecotourism.

This thesis is aiming to study the ecotourism operators’ management of facing dilemmas in the ecotourism industry in Sweden. Therefore, the study is contributing to new knowledge in the lack of research in the field. We have identified the knowledge gap which is from the frontline practitioner’s, ecotourism operator point of view on how to manage dilemmas in this strong sustainable industry, ecotourism.

We structure a literature review where we provide with broader definitions of the major concepts: tourism, sustainable development and ecotourism. Ecotourism is considered as possessing strong sustainability features. The literature review is focused mainly in Swedish context and literature supporting the business purpose of a small firm has been highlighted. The theoretical framework is also presenting research done about the different aspects of sustainable development (economic, social and environment) with the context in ecotourism, which is also presenting the dilemmas that can occur among the perspectives. The theoretical framework ends with some suggestions on how tour operators balance the three perspectives, i.e. economic, social and environment.

The study takes form as a qualitative study with an exploratory approach. We are aiming at providing new information and knowledge in the field, which has been lacking in research in the Swedish context. By having telephone interviews with eight ecotourism operators across Sweden, we are aiming to gain heterogeneity in respondents’ selection and try to find out if there are any common thoughts and at the same time unique practices among the respondents.

Our main conclusions are answering the question on how the ecotourism operators manage the dilemmas in the ecotourism industry in Sweden. We acknowledge that ecotourism operators are expected to aim at strong sustainability which concerns on the environmental and social issues. This frames their way of operating the ecotourism business. The ecotourism operators manage dilemmas by communicating, educating, cooperating, marketing, raising price (or no raise), limiting number of tourists and by being professional.

Keywords: ecotourism, ecotourism operators, dilemma, three perspectives, eco-tour.
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- Landskapet JO
- MCraft.se
- Naturupplevelser i Lappland
- Rid i Jorm
- Stockholm Adventures
- The Silent Way
- Vildmark i Värmland

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With the future ahead us, we look forward using the knowledge and experiences we have gained from this work and we feel proud to present this thesis to the rest of the world.
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1. Introduction

The introducing chapter is contributing with a background for the topic in a way for the reader to understand the recent research and our reason for studying this specific topic. After discussing the problem area, the problem statement follows and the chapter ends with declaring the purpose of the thesis.

Since tourism is one of the fastest growing industries worldwide it is also a widespread research topic. Sweden is a country in which tourism has the tendency to grow according to data and statistics from United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Nutek, 2008). The increase of amount of travels and tourists in 1980s raised the awareness of the negative changes in natural and cultural environment in some destinations which are resulted from tourism activities (Dowling and Fennell, 2001). For instance, global tourism has been acknowledged as highly influencing the contribution to emissions of greenhouse gases, by which transport is the particular reason. (Gössling & Hall, 2008) Hence this leads to the aim for reaching sustainable development which concerns the three components: economy, environment and social affairs. Since the three components are related to different interests, they could be complementing or contradicting with each other.

Budeanu (2005) finds that the tour operator is an important actor within the tourism industry since they can influence the sustainability of the whole industry, such as policy design and their way of operating the business. This is what Medina-Muñoz & Medina-Muñoz (2000) also point out, that small firms have the possibility to play an important role at the destination. Though, in both of the researches the interaction between the three components in sustainable development is lacking. Moen & Fredman (2007) acknowledge that the components are interacting with each other both in terms of beneficial means and disadvantageous means, in their case study of the effects of climate change on alpine skiing in Sweden. They found out that climate change influences the richness of snow and therefore affects the economy of ski resorts and local communities, while on the other hand the disturbance on nature and wildlife decreases. (Moen & Fredman, 2007) The research highlights the conflicts of interests among the three components, but it does not provide practical solutions which tour operators can pursue.

Tepelus (2005) has done a research which provides with findings on how tour operators use some tools for reaching a sustainable development in mass tourism in practice. He is concerned with viewing the different sizes of tour operators, structure of firm, organizational culture and financial capacity in order to view the various common practices. The research is highlighting the importance of common practice among tour operators, but the interactions among the sustainable components are also lacking in the research.

Ecotourism is a strong sustainable industry due to its main focus on environmental and social concerns. It is highly dependent on the natural environment and local society. The increased acknowledgement of the problem of environment and social related problems is making ecotourism as the fastest growing component in tourism industry (UNWTO 1998 in Dowling and Fennell, 2003; Gouvea, 2004; Boyd and Butler, 1996). More than half of the case studies regarding to ecotourism are focused in less developed countries destinations where more
problems arise due to tourism development. In order to solve the existing problems, more researches are done in those countries. (Weaver, 1999)

The context of ecotourism in Sweden is less researched, though there are some studies related to this field. Wurzinger & Johansson (2006) has done a research on comparing Swedish ecotourists, nature tourists and city tourists in order to find out the differences and similarities between the groups in terms of environmental concern and knowledge. However, as one of the main concerns for ecotourism, social component has not been discussed. Other researches involving farm tourism (Gössling & Mattson, 2002), literary tourism (Müller, 2006) and second-home tourism (Müller, 2005) are concerning sustainable development and tourism in Sweden. They do not mention the interactions between the components which can be contradicting with each other and lead to some dilemmas. Also, the researches touch upon a specific branch in tourism only instead of investigating the whole ecotourism industry. Apart from them, there are recent researches done on the ecotourism among Scandinavian countries and have been collected into an editorial book by Gössling and Hultman (2006). The researches have various focuses: case studies in different countries other than in Sweden; conflicts and challenges on a specific type of tour in ecotourism but not the dilemmas in between the three sustainable components; studies on tourist’s behavior instead of ecotourism operator’s; etc.

Even though we have found some recent studies which are related to ecotourism or sustainable development in tourism, we could hardly find any research which focus on the interaction among the main concerns in ecotourism or sustainable development especially in the Swedish context. The few studies about ecotourism in Sweden maybe due to the comparatively less apparent negative consequences noticed so far than those in developing countries. Research priority has been given to solve those problems already appeared obviously. But the ecotourism industry in Sweden is still growing. We see the importance of raising the awareness regarding the impacts on/of this industry. If there would be a potential risk, it is better to prevent that from happening before it is too late.

Besides, the sustainability of a tourism business depends highly on the operating practice of tour operators who are the tourism service providers closest to the end consumer (tourists). However, research from tour operator’s perspective in ecotourism industry has been lacking. Considering their importance in ecotourism, it is necessary to enhance the knowledge on achieving stronger sustainability among ecotourism operating business. Focus should be put on helping them to better handle the various interests and deal with the dilemmas among them so as to pursue the goal of ecotourism.

1.1 Problem statement

*How do ecotourism operators manage dilemmas within the ecotourism industry in Sweden?*

1.2 The purpose of the thesis
The aim of the thesis is first to identify dilemmas ecotourism operators face in Sweden. By pursuing a qualitative study it is also providing with understanding how they react to and manage the dilemmas in ecotourism in order to achieve sustainability in economic, social and environmental aspects. Therefore, the thesis will raise awareness about the existing dilemmas
ecotourism operators face, and at the same time provide with their common and specific practices, and finally some recommendations to them.

The outcome of this study is not only beneficial to the ecotourism operators, but also to other tour operators who are not involved in ecotourism. This could become a guideline for the management to balance the contradicting aspects. Also, other organizations, such as Swedish Ecotourism Society, the Swedish government and non-governmental organizations or even other parties from the rest of the world who are working with ecotourism, might find the information valuable in order to understand the practices of ecotourism operators in this industry. This indeed adds input to more knowledge and information in the lack of research in the area.
2. Theoretical Methodology

The aim of the theoretical methodological chapter is to provide with an understanding of the study and describe our view on science and knowledge. Our knowledge in the area before studying the area is provided, and then followed by the choice of method for the thesis. The chapter concludes with a description on how secondary data was collected and potential critical issues that could affect the final results of the study.

This topic, ecotourism, was originally based on our interest in tourism and an environmental concern. We both acknowledge that this industry is under constant change. Tour operators who are closely working with environment and society have to consider their impacts on these two aspects. We discovered that the concept of ecotourism is based on tourism but with the consideration on environment conservation and the support of local community. The concept also exists in Sweden which is promoted by the Swedish Ecotourism Society and its quality label Nature’s Best. Research and attention from the academic world is lacking in terms of highlighting the existence of dilemmas within the industry and also how they were managed by tour operators in ecotourism. We think that this topic is important not only for ecotourism operators in Sweden, but also for the society, the government, tourists and other tour operators. What we include in this chapter is the foundation for building the theoretical framework and research design in later chapters.

2.1 Preconceptions

The perceptions of the world we have had before working on the thesis started have highly influenced throughout the whole research. We have different background and experiences in terms of childhood, education, social norms, etc. Thus, by acknowledging the impact our preconceptions on the process and the results of the thesis, we think it is important to discuss this matter in the thesis (Holme & Solvang, 1997).

We have been growing up in very different places on the planet. One of us grew up in a big international city, Hong Kong, with the mixture of European and Asian norms and influences. The other grew up in a quiet and small city in the north of Sweden, who was influenced by the trips abroad to get an international and personal perspective on the world. The common background we have is the management courses we took at Umeå School of Business and Economics (USBE). That brought us together for this thesis since we got to know each other and discovered that we have similar interests.

We are aware that preconceptions shape our way of thinking around the thesis and also the process, which will in the end influence the outcome of the study. First of all, how did we become the human beings we are today? And how do we look forward to the future? With the different locations we grew up in, we had varied views on environment and how the real life should be looked upon. One of us learned more about environmental concerns when visiting Sweden and also staying in the country for nine months, the other has taken courses at the university about marketing ethics which included Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), ethical considerations and environmental impact of the industry. Then “how about tourism?,” we thought.
Considering our common background, business studies, we also had similar preconceptions on business. We had no doubt about regarding tourism as a business. Throughout years of studies, our main focus has been placed on how to earn profit for companies. We noticed a conflict of making money and conserving environment at the same time, which was how we discovered the research area. Then, what did we know about ecotourism, or what did we think we knew about ecotourism before reading and studying this topic?

We believe that our preconceptions have an impact not only on the topic, but also the way to structure and content of the thesis. Since the interview guide is relied upon the theoretical background we have, we think that there are some impacts on interview questions as well from our preconceptions about the concept. For instance, the relation between ecotourism and sustainable tourism are two concepts which have been actively discussed upon between us. Our first impression before gaining knowledge about the two concepts from reading articles and researches was that the two concepts were the same and equal to one another. We later found out that this was not the case. The two concepts touch and interfere with each other, but this does not mean that the concepts are equal. This is later explained in the theoretical chapter. What we want to highlight here is to give an example on how the preconceptions influence our thinking. The preconceptions are influencing the thesis in both positive and negative ways. We realize that they are essential to serve as the preconditions of the research; but we are trying to avoid the negative impacts by being open to surprises and new knowledge that we did not know before starting the study.

Our opinion is that the preconceptions are important to emphasize because of the influences on this study. This discussion could proceed for many more pages, but what we want to add is that we are aware of the presence of preconceptions.

### 2.2 Research philosophy

The purpose of the research philosophy is to declare our view on reality and consider different ways on perceiving the world (Saunders et al, 2007). The choice of research philosophy will influence the decision on which method to use and also what the results of the study will be. Our way on perceiving science and the world is, as for others, complicated. There is no absolute right or wrong since the viewer could have different perceptions. Our thesis is not aiming for discovering what is bad or good in ecotourism, or what the ecotourism operators do wrong or right. Instead we are trying to understand and interpret thoughts and feelings from respondents and representatives from the ecotourism industry. How do they perceive the world from their point of view?

We address ourselves as interpretativists, but we cannot ignore that there are some positivistic influences within us. We want to make the world easier to understand by categorizing and from our inculcated; we learned norms and values from our parents and other people to understand the surrounding. We were told: “no” or “yes”, which became the reality that something was either wrong or right. By growing up and experiencing the world by travelling, educating and working we understood that people want to make things easier to understand; and opinions could differ from person to person depending on their perception. Then, who can become a God and decide that what you say or do is right or wrong? To summarize this, we mean that the positivists within us are still apparent at times, though with the development of ourselves and our experiences we view the world from. We are more interpretativistic since we view the world by comprehending and understanding the connections between human beings instead of finding out the absolute rights and wrongs.
Our view on the world and science is influencing the ways of finding the results of the thesis and eventually the outcome. We will interpret the concept that shaped by our preconceptions and the findings of studies and researches, which will derive to the theoretical chapter. By interpreting the theories, we create questions for the respondents. The questions will be interpreted by the respondent, which then we will also interpret in our own way. This is where the research philosophy intervenes again since it is influencing our aim on what we want to achieve in understanding the respondent. Our perspective is therefore of subjective kind where we know we and the respondent are influencing each other. The outcome of that might have a negative impact if we stick into our preconceptions and prediction and ignore the opinions from the respondents. We, therefore, avoid the negative outcome from preconceptions by staying open to new answers and understanding the interviewee.

As a conclusion, we think it is not quite possible to take a stand for which definite research philosophy to be adopted here; and we do not think we have to take an absolute stand either. It is normal and reasonable to believe that everyone has different extent of interpretativistic and positivistic characteristics. Though, we believe that we have more an interpretativistic point of view as we have explained before.

2.3 Research approach
The approach of the research consists of providing with theories and earlier research in the area, which creates the framework for outlining an interview guide and collecting empirical results; this is called a deductive approach (Saunders et al, 2007). We reviewed literature in the field in order to gain knowledge on what have already been researched on. By lining up theories and concepts, we are able to test the theories by applying them in practice in order to understand concepts and discover patterns, which is the deductive phase of the thesis. However, since this research area of ecotourism in Sweden from tour operator’s perspective on the dilemmas is still new, not many theories and previous researches are available to fully support our study. This indicates an induction phase where we expect that we might come across some new phenomena when collecting information in the empirics. Therefore, we are not restricted to only deduction since we are moving back and forth between being deductive and inductive throughout the process of the thesis.

2.4 Perspective
Derived from our thesis’s problem statement and purpose, the perspective of the study is from the ecotourism operator. In order to understand how an operator can achieve strong sustainability in ecotourism, the perspective is gained from the top management’s point of view. Since majority of the tour operators in Sweden have very few employees, the owner usually work as the top managers. Therefore, the main perspective is from the managers/owners of the company, as they shape the business and they are involving in working on achieving sustainability in ecotourism in practice.

2.5 Choice of method
The thesis consists of a qualitative research which aims to gain more in depth information and findings from the respondent through interviews (Silverman, 2000). It is the reason for choosing the method on how ecotourism operators achieve sustainability in ecotourism with the existence of dilemmas. This method is an appropriate approach to explore the more extensive thoughts and the reasoning of behavior of ecotourism operators due to our limited
prior knowledge about this industry in Sweden. Therefore this thesis also takes form as an exploratory study since it is providing with new insights in ecotourism. (Saunders, 2007)

2.6 Secondary data
The search for secondary data has been done in order to get the knowledge in what has been researched so far in the theme of tourism, sustainable development, ecotourism, sustainable tourism, small companies, the three perspectives (economic, environment and social) in ecotourism and how to handle the dilemmas in ecotourism. The theories and researches used consist mostly of scientific articles such as researches published in Tourism Management, Journal of Sustainable Tourism, Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism etc. Also some editorial books were used in order to define and contribute with basic information. In order to find the suitable material that we were looking for, the databases we mostly used were Samsök, which is a search engine that gathers the databases for business researches and others. A function called MetaSearch helped us to search on the databases Business Source Premier, Emerald and Helecon at the same time which indicated that we got a wide spread of potential articles. Another database used was Scholar.google.com to search for specific authors and articles.

Table 1 below shows some of the different words that we used to find information for the theoretical framework:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search word(s)</th>
<th>Hits on MetaSearch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ecotourism</td>
<td>1445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable tourism</td>
<td>2286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>96967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism and sustainability</td>
<td>844</td>
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<tr>
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<td>611</td>
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<td>Ecotourism in Sweden</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicts of sustainability</td>
<td>795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balancing sustainability</td>
<td>528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable tourism in Sweden</td>
<td>133</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tour operator in Ecotourism</td>
<td>29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strong and weak sustainability</td>
<td>668</td>
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<td>Ecotourism operator</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small enterprise growth</td>
<td>9736</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Search word(s) in MetaSearch

The table shows that the different words we used to search for resulted in number of hits on articles. Worth noting is the research done about ecotourism in Sweden, which has a hit of 23 articles. Although, searching only for ecotourism, the results of articles include also sustainable tourism. This indicates that the two concepts might be easily interpreted as belonging together or has the tendency to go into each other. We think the two concepts are different and we will discuss this further in the theoretical framework. It is necessary to use various keywords in order to find appropriate sources.

2.6.1 Evaluation on secondary data
Choosing and interpreting secondary data can influence and make impacts on the results. Therefore, we find that it is important to reflect upon and acknowledge the eventual impact of the secondary source on the results. This can affect the ability to answer our research question.
and purpose of thesis (Saunders, 2007). Evaluation of the secondary data is therefore needed to help us choose and make sure the theories that we have used are appropriate.

The main problem we faced when searching for secondary sources is the lack of previous studies from the same research perspective. There are plenty of literatures regarding tourism as a whole, but for ecotourism, a lot of studies have been focusing on case studies in less developing countries. Since different countries could have very distinct situation and perception on ecotourism, it is making the use of those chosen materials risky to some extents for the understanding of the concept. Readers and even ourselves might be misled to inappropriate perceptions or taken for granted assumptions. We have kept this in mind and at the same time evaluated the secondary sources by their suitability for providing with information on general and basic understanding related to our study area. One example is the use of defining ecotourism from several sources and comparing the definitions in order to gain the common ideas about the concept.

We have been searching for the original source of the secondary data, since the interpretation done by different researchers could affect on our own interpretation of the same source (Johansson Lindfors, 1993). In cases of not being able to reach the original source, the use of closest research has been interpreted in which we acknowledge that it can have a negative impact on the reliability of the source. We have, therefore, provided with several researches in the same area to find the main comprehension of the original source.

The age of the secondary data is also important to evaluate. Tourism has been defined differently in different periods of time, in which we have provided with an overview to understand the development of the tourism concept. When evaluating the researches done on ecotourism, it has been defined in 80 different ways (Dowling & Fennell in Fennell & Dowling, 2003) which implies that the concept has many different perceptions. We need to have the definitions which apply on the Swedish context and highlight the most important components in ecotourism. Therefore, we provide with an overview of the definitions on the concept in the next chapter.
3. Theoretical framework

This chapter is providing with information based on previous researches done in the field of tourism, sustainable development, ecotourism, the business purpose of a small firm, the three perspectives in ecotourism, dilemmas in ecotourism and finally managing the dilemmas. The chapter will end with a summary on what have been found in previous researches.

3.1 Tourism

Tourism is a growing industry. From 1950 to 2005, the international tourists flow has grown from 25 millions to 805 millions, which accounts for an annual growth of 6.5%. The latest report on global tourism shows a growth of 2% of international tourists and arrivals reaching 924 millions in 2008, despite the hit of global financial crisis which led to a downturn in the tourism industry. Europe experienced less inbound tourists; while Middle East, Africa and America had positive growth in inbound tourism. The United Nation World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) believes that the tourism industry will be facing a time in downturn or insecurity. They claim that the features of this downturn were caused by financial crisis which would be different from that resulted from outbreak of disease, such as SARS in 2003, or terrorist attack. The financial reason would be the main factor affecting people’s desire to travel. Therefore, UNWTO estimates that tourists will be travelling closer to their homes, staying for a shorter period of time, and also waiting until some special promotion offered by the companies. Destinations where have comparatively weak currency rate will also be more attractive to visitors. The forecast in Tourism 2020 Vision by UNWTO shows the trend of international tourism that Europe will still be the dominating market but with a slower growth pace. It is followed by Asia and the Pacific, while Americas will be on third place. In total, forecasted amount of international tourist arrivals is 1.6 billions, with a growth rate of 4.1% from 1995. (UNWTO 2009a; UNWTO 2009b)

The tourism industry in Sweden is developing in the same pace as other regions in the world, although tourism is of less significant to the Swedish economy than it is in many other countries. According to Nutek, the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, (the public authority in Sweden for statistical data about tourism industry in Sweden), Sweden’s gross domestic product (GDP) has a lower percentage, 2.9%, consisting tourism compared to other countries, e.g. Spain has 11%; Norway has 4.7% of GDP that consists of tourism. However, the tourism industry has been growing in terms of its importance in Sweden. Comparing to the neighboring countries, Norway, Denmark and Finland, Sweden has the largest share of foreign tourism. (Figure 1) (Nutek, 2008) Sweden, therefore, has a leading position in the tourism industry within the Scandinavian region.

Regarding actual revenue generated, leisure and business tourists spent over SEK 215 billions in Sweden during 2006. Swedish leisure tourists account for 44.7% of the total turnover, followed by foreign visitors, 34.9%; and the rest comes from Swedish business tourists. The five largest markets of foreign visitors come from Norway, Germany, Denmark, Netherlands and UK. This shows that the tourism industry in Sweden depends on domestic tourism more than international tourism; and the incoming visitors are also mainly from neighboring countries. For the domestic tourism, around three quarters Swedish leisure tourists and more than half of business tourists choose to travel by car, which is far more popular than the second transportation mode, i.e. by train. Tourism industry has provided employment
exceeding the total numbers employed in Sweden by the eleven major companies including Volvo AB and Ericsson. Therefore, tourism is becoming more influential in Swedish context. (Nutek, 2008)

Figure 1: Inbound tourism in the Nordic countries (Source: Nutek, 2008, page 9)

### 3.1.1 Definition of tourism

Tourism is not an easily definable term. Since the word ‘tourist’ first appeared, the definition of ‘tourism’ has been an arguable topic crossing two centuries already (Cooper et al, 2005). Two pioneers of tourism research, Hunziker and Krapf, suggested one of the oldest conceptual definitions of tourism in 1942 (Vanhove, 2005). Due to the complexity of tourism and the economical as well as social impacts brought from its related activities, different scholars and organizations in the world have done researches, amendments or re-definitions on ‘tourism’. Several conceptual definitions of tourism have been compared and discussed by different scholars, which are summarized as below (Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>Hunziker and Krapf (in Vanhove, 2005, p.2)</td>
<td>“Tourism is a sum of relations and phenomena resulting from travel and stay of non residents, in so far a stay does not lead to permanent residence and is not connected with any permanent or temporary earning activity.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Burkart and Medlik (in Vanhove, 2005, p.2)</td>
<td>“Tourism is deemed to include any activity concerned with the temporary short-term movement of people to destinations outside the places where they normally live and work, and their activities during the stay at these destinations.”</td>
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<td>1990</td>
<td>Gilbert (in Vanhove, 2005, p.3)</td>
<td>“Tourism is one part of recreation which involves travel to a less familiar destination or community, for a short-term period, in order to satisfy a consumer need for one or a combination of activities.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Tourism Satellite Account: Recommended Methodological Framework (TSA: RMF) (Eurostat et al, 2001, in Vanhove, 2005, p.4)</td>
<td>“Tourism comprises the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited.”</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 2: A summary of definitions on tourism
The summary shows various definitions, and they all agree upon that tourism consists of a short-term period, outside of the place the tourist come from, and a combination of activities at the destination. Though in later years, they have specified the short-term concept and included the definition of travel purpose. Throughout the whole 20th century, there was no universal definition on ‘tourism’ which was applied to all countries. Finally, the last definition from the above table 2, which was announced on the Vancouver Conference of 2001, has been accepted worldwide. During the same occasion, the definition of visitor was also announced: A visitor is defined as: “any person travelling to a place other than that of his/her usual environment for less than twelve months and whose main purpose of trip is other than the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited.” (Vanhove, 2005, p.3)

The same definitions of “tourism” and “visitor” are also adopted in Sweden by Nutek, which is the tourism statistics authority and also as the information hub for the development of tourism, and the travel and tourism industry in Sweden. (Nutek, 2008)

Vanhove (2005) has summarized the main characteristics of tourism from a business context. Within tourism, small and medium sized companies are dominating the industry. The activities that are proposed to the visitors are called services in business concepts, making the tourism industry supplying with services. Seasonality is the keyword for the demand-side, depending on e.g. the seasons, weather, climate etc. The tourist product are a blend of activities, which also means that the tourism products cannot be saved or stored but instead are fresh services and also interdependent. (Vanhove, 2005)

Cooper (et al, 2005) has made a more specific summary of the essential parts of tourism that are as following:

- Tourism is a movement of people who are staying at various places/destinations
- Tourism consists of two elements:
  - The trip to the destination
  - The stay and activities at the destination
- Tourism takes place outside of the ordinary environment and place a visitor has. Also, the activities taken place at the destination are distinct different from the residents living in the area.
- The movement of people consists of short-period of time and the visitor is supposed to return to their ordinary environment within days, weeks or months.
- The trip consists of purposes other than establishing a permanent life in the place visited.

3.1.2 Tourism classification

During the Vancouver Conference in 2001, the Tourism Satellite Account: Recommended Methodological Framework (TSA: RMF 2000) had been announced. The purpose of this framework is to standardize tourism statistics for international use. TSA: RMF 2000 was initiated by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), with the participation of the Statistical Office of the European Communities (EUROSTAT), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). It was revised in 2008 by the same group of organizations. (UNSD et al, 2008) In the latest 2008 Tourism Satellite Account: Recommended Methodological Framework (TSA: RMF 2008), tourism is divided into the following categories according to the travel direction and destination:

- **Domestic tourism** – means the activities that a tourist from the country is joining, either in domestic trip (destination within one’s own country) or part of an outbound trip (e.g. visitor from Umeå travels to London and spends one night in Stockholm).
• **Inbound tourism** – the activities that related to tourism in which a visitor from another country is visiting the country of the destination. (i.e. incoming travel)

• **Outbound tourism** – a visitor from the reference country is travelling or/and staying in places outside the country which are a part of an outbound trip or as part of a domestic trip. (i.e. outgoing travel)

• **Internal tourism** – includes domestic and inbound tourism, which is the activities visitors from the destination-country or from another country are using, and which are within the reference country. Either as domestic or international trips.

• **National tourism** – both domestic and outbound tourism, which means that the visitors from the destination-country are travelling or/and staying at places within and outside of the reference country. These are either domestic or outbound trips.


The different categories of tourism can help define the destination and direction in which visitors can be classified within. By doing this classification, the easier it is to identify the tourism’s direction and acknowledgement of the amount of domestic travels, inbound trips and outbound trips. In Sweden, the domestic tourism contributes the largest part of the whole tourism industry. Inbound tourism of Sweden occupied the largest share among the Nordic countries. (Nutek, 2008) These two tourism categories together, which is internal tourism, is the centre of our study. To be more specific, we will focus from the supply side’s point of view on analyzing the internal tourism in Sweden.

### 3.2 Sustainable development

Tourism has been seen as a tool for social and economic development especially in developing countries due to the obvious positive social and economic impacts, such as employment and income generation, brought to the host countries (Vanhove, 2005; McCool & Moisey, 2009). It is not hard to imagine for those tourism depending countries, who especially like to attract international visitors who can bring in foreign money. It includes movement of capital, people and ideas crossing boarders which are the same features of tourism and globalization (Reiser, 2003). Globalization is one of the most obvious trends in tourism demand (Vanhove, 2005). It is a concept widely used nowadays, which indicates that a number of trends in the world challenging the world’s capacity on e.g. production of a large scale of products. There are many trends to include, such as economic, political, sociological and environmental trends. These trends stand for increasing interdependence of markets, movement of production to other countries, flows of exchanges across boarders, mergers and acquisitions and international strategies, increase in labour, more liberal world economic order, or etc. (Smeral; Hall in Smeral, 1998) The trends are world-wide and therefore blurring international boarders and making the ‘distances’ between countries smaller and closer. These examples would be stated of being the positive outcomes of globalization, while there is a negative impact of globalization as well.

The negative views on globalization consists of poorer conditions for employees in developed countries by loosing jobs to developing countries, but also for the employees in the developing countries with low wages, who would face a higher risk of being unemployed or decline in wages. The different interests of companies and local community may for example cause tensions and conflicts, since the profit of the large corporation might at some cases be larger than the country’s national income altogether, which makes the conflict adherent. (Leamer; Hall in Smeral, 1998)
Concerning the effects of the globalization that has a major impact on the society, an emergent way of thinking has been highlighted – sustainable development. One of the reasons for the highlight of sustainability in tourism industry was the increasing amount of tourists and travels in the 1980s, which meant a growing destruction of the natural resources such as a negative impact on the environment. (Dowling and Fennell, 2003)

The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) published a report called *Our common future*, also named as the Brundtland report, which reached the conclusion that through a sustainable use of the natural and environmental resources, a long-term growth of economic resources can be achieved. (WCED, 1987) Following the report, definition of sustainable development was developed: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (WCED, 1987, page 43). Therefore, the production and consumption of today’s products and services shall be appropriate in order for the future generations to prosper and, in the long term, have a good quality of life. (Crane and Matten, 2007). Sustainable development can be summed up into five basic principles of sustainability which are as following:

1. “The idea of holistic planning and strategy making
2. The importance of preserving essential ecological processes
3. The need to protect both human heritage and biodiversity
4. The need to develop in a manner that fosters long-term productivity sustainable for future generations
5. The goal of achieving a better balance of equity among nations”

(Bramwell and Lane in Dowling and Fennell, 2003, page 4)

Even though there is a definition on sustainable development, it does not indicate whether it is strong or weak. Therefore a more suitable way of measuring how far a company is working accordingly sustainable development is by measuring how strong or weak sustainability they have. This is a matter of degree when we talk about strength of sustainability. Weak and strong sustainability can be discussed by further splitting it into four different degrees; very weak, weak, strong and very strong sustainability. (Turner et al, 1994; Kemp 2005 in Bonnedahl et al, 2007)

### 3.2.1 Weak sustainability

A very weak sustainable development consists of increasing capital in infrastructure, human capital and social capital on the expense of natural resources, such as polluting water, air, and land. (Kemp 2005 in Bonnedahl et al, 2007) This means that the consumption and overall stock capital will be constant in time, while the natural resources will decline. If any asset will be reduced, then some other capital asset will increase to compensate this loss. (Turner et al, 1994)

A weak sustainable development includes that a certain amount of preserved environmental resources will be saved, and therefore a limit will be set for how much the human life can be increased in quality. (Kemp in Bonnedahl et al, 2007) This is more concerned about managing the human needs, supporting species and genetic diversity, instead of putting the concern about preserving the ecological systems in the first place. (Turner et al, 1994) This perspective is more according to thinking about the future generation’s survival by not exceeding the needed balance in the ecosystem.
3.2.2 Strong sustainability

Having declared the weak point of view on sustainability, the strong and very strong perspectives are presented in this part. Strong sustainability concerns with the ecosystems and aims for a constant amount of natural resources are maintained. This could be done by using renewable resources instead of non-renewable natural resources. (Kemp in Bonnedahl et al, 2007) Turner (et al, 1994) argues that change of the economic resource allocations are needed in order for the environment not to be significantly affected. In this part we have moved from concerning mainly on sustaining economy and human life to a more environmental point of view from companies.

Very strong sustainability is demanding that the same amount of resources is required for future generations to utilize. (Kemp in Bonnedahl et al, 2007) This implies that zero economic growth and zero population growth are needed to ensure this will be realized. (Turner et al, 1994) This perspective is the most extreme case which cares about the environment and resources, for the wellbeing of the planet and future human beings.

Although, it is hard to put a clear cut between the above four types of sustainability, this concept still provides way to describe and measure the degree towards two ends of weak and strong sustainability. (Turner et al, 1994; Kemp 2005 in Bonnedahl et al, 2007) By having these concepts in mind, it can be easier to evaluate the sustainability in ecotourism, which we will mention later.

3.2.3 Sustainable tourism

Sustainable tourism is a concept developed during the late 1980s and early 1990s (Bramwell and Lane, 1993; Hunter, 1995 in Gilmore et al, 2007). It is derived from the idea of sustainable development and applied in the tourism context (Leung et al, 2009). Due to the growing knowledge of the negative impact from tourism, and the essence of a well-being nature and community, the concept of sustainable tourism was developed (Gilmore et al, 2007). UNWTO has defined sustainable tourism as: “Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future. If is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems.” (UNWTO et al, 1996) The aim of sustainable tourism should be to capture the economic benefits of tourism without damaging or degrading the resources upon which tourism ultimately relies (UN, 2009a, p.5).

From the above definition, sustainable tourism is more focusing on obtaining economic benefits while at the same time having the ecological and social concerns. Since the definition emphasizes on the economic aspect in the industry, sustainable tourism could not be regarded as having strong sustainability but closer to weak sustainability by looking at the definition alone. But it is worth noting that sustainable tourism involves very different forms of business within tourism industry which could operate in very distinct ways, and hence result in various degrees on sustainability. Therefore, we cannot draw a conclusion of “sustainable tourism has weak sustainability” from its definition. However, what we could see is that achieving sustainable tourism does not necessarily aim at strong or very strong sustainability.
### 3.3 Ecotourism

Apart from sustainable tourism, *ecotourism* is another term widely used nowadays in tourism industry. Ecotourism, which is highly depended on the environment and the local community, is a natural component toward strong sustainable development. Ecotourism differs from sustainable tourism in the sense that the activities involved in ecotourism must have a strong relationship with the natural environment and local communities but which is not necessarily the same case in sustainable tourism. Consumers within the ecotourism industry seem to be well educated and rich individuals which originate from advanced industrial societies (Honey, 1999 and Wearing and Neil, 1999, in Uriely et al 2007).

Ecotourism is the most rapidly growing component in the tourism industry (UNWTO 1998 in Dowling and Fennell, 2003; Gouvea, 2004; Boyd and Butler, 1996). An outcome of the growth is a growing research area making the defining process of the word more accessible. The definition of ecotourism has been widely examined in the tourism literature and researches (Fennell, 2001) and is still under discussion by numerous scholars and organizations. Below in table 3, an overview on the definitions on ecotourism is provided.

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
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<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) 2009</td>
<td>&quot;Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people.” The principle of ecotourism is: “Ecotourism is about uniting conservation, communities, and sustainable travel. This means that those who implement and participate in ecotourism activities should follow the following six ecotourism principles: 1. Minimize impact. 2. Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect. 3. Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts. 4. Provide direct financial benefits for conservation. 5. Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people. 6. Raise sensitivity to host countries’ political, environmental, and social climate.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Honey (1999) page 25</td>
<td>“travel to fragile, pristine, and usually protected areas that strives to be low impact and (usually) small scale. It helps educate the tourist; provides funds for conservation; directly benefits the economic development and political empowerment of local communities; and fosters respect for different cultures and for human rights.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>WWF (2006)</td>
<td>“There is no generally accepted definition of ecotourism, but it is widely understood that it: • is nature-based • is small scale or operates with small groups • contributes actively to nature conservation • offers excellent nature interpretation • is based in, actively involves and benefits the local community. While ecotourism is almost always nature-based tourism, not all nature-based tourism is ecotourism!”</td>
</tr>
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Table 3: The several definitions of ecotourism
As noticed in the table, ecotourism concerns about nature conservation, benefiting local community. Some other important elements are found as operating in small scale, providing financial benefits for conservation, respecting different cultures, experiencing and educating. Without emphasizing the economic concern of operating the tourism business, ecotourism can be regarded as aiming at a strong sustainability. Nowadays, the most commonly used definition by the researchers and industry practitioners is from The International Ecotourism Society (TIES):

"Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people (TIES, 1990).” (TIES, 2009)

Generally ecotourism is perceived as an alternative expression for sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism as mentioned previously is derived from the principles of sustainable development, but ecotourism can be seen as a niche market segment within the sustainable tourism, (Holtz and Edwards, 2003) or the nature-based tourism (Leung et al, 2009).

Sustainable tourism and ecotourism are different in the original focus. The former concept came from sustainable development which stresses on the concerns of social and environmental issues while achieving economic benefit. The ultimate goal is for the continuous and prosperous development (in all aspects) in the future. Referring to strong and weak type of sustainable development, sustainable tourism could be a strong or weak sustainability practice depending on the degree of environmental and social concerns involvement in each industry and company. For ecotourism, the main underlining focus is to minimize the negative impacts on and to conserve both natural environment and local community from all kinds of tourism activities. From the descriptions of ecotourism we have discussed earlier, individual economic benefit is not as obvious as the environmental and social benefits. Ecotourism can be considered as a strong sustainable industry comparing to the concept of sustainable tourism, which we have discussed previously, as it concerns about the ecosystems and local society; and aims at maintaining a constant amount of natural resources. In this paper, we only focus on the discussion of ecotourism which should possess strong sustainability.

3.3.1 Ecotourism in Sweden

Tourism in Sweden (as well as in Scandinavia) has been generally conceptualized as ecotourism due to its majority tourism products are nature-based and organized in small scale in local regions which are aligned with the principles of ecotourism (Gössling and Hultman, 2006). As one of the special features which encourage the development of ecotourism in Sweden, the allemansrätten (the right of public access to the countryside) affirms the right for everyone to move freely across private land holdings (protected areas could have different restrictions), for example picking mushrooms, flowers and berries, under the principle of “Don’t Disturb; Don’t Destroy”. Everyone is also allowed to stay at the same spot for one night. The survival of this right is probably largely attributable to the fact that Sweden is sparsely populated. (Sandell, 2006; SEPA, 2009) Considering the nature coverage in Sweden, individuals and ecotourism operators can take advantages of the right to do different kinds of activities in the nature.

Svenska Ekoturismföreningen, in English: Swedish Ecotourism Society (SES; also named as The Ecotourism Society of Sweden or Swedish Ecotourism Association), was founded in 1996. It shared and adopted the definition of ecotourism from TIES. Ecotourism has been explained in more detail by Swedish Ecotourism Society as a way to travel that:
takes place with maximal caution and minimal impact on local nature and culture;
aims at conservation of the biodiversity and cultural heritage that the visitor has come
to visit;
actively contributes to conservation;
sources services and products locally;
enables respectful encounters with, and is considerate of local people;
is often carried out in small groups. Always with the integrity of nature and culture in
mind;
makes nature and culture experiences available that would otherwise be difficult or
impossible to organize independently;
represents cutting edge on best environmental practice, thus guiding the remaining
Travel & Tourism industry on the inspirational path towards more eco-friendly
operations;
provides visitors with privileged insight and in-depth knowledge about issues related
to nature, culture, environment and/or socio-economic development;
means personalized encounters with the ecotourism operator and its representatives;
is about experiencing nature, often interlinked with strong cultural aspects;
is marketed responsibly, providing realistic expectations in the customer; and
makes demands on tour operators, services providers and visitors alike.

(SES et al, 2002, p.4)

In Sweden, all ecotourism operators should follow the above principles in running their
business. But the principles are only descriptive guidelines for the operators. These are not
compulsory regulations for the tour operators, since the degree of compliance is difficult to
measure.

3.3.2 Certification and quality labeling in Sweden

Nowadays, there are over 60 tourism certification programs worldwide. A wide range of
certifications are found in Sweden, for instance Bo på Lantgård (Stay on a Farm), Det
Naturliga Fisket (Natural Fishing) and Naturlig Laddning (Nature-based activities), for the
nature related tourism activities (Gössling, 2006). In 2002, the Swedish Ecotourism Society,
in cooperation with the Swedish Travel and Tourism Council, has launched the first national
ecotourism labeling system, Nature’s Best, to enhance the quality of ecotourism in Sweden
and to significantly increase its volume. Nature’s Best is the only ecotourism quality label
nowadays which certifies the nature tours offered by the tour operators in Sweden. In order to
have the tours being labeled, the tour operator needs to go through the application process and
pay for the application fee as well as the annual fee for the label. Both the company and its
products have to be assessed in order to get the quality label. Nature’s Best serves as a guide
for tourists and visitors to choose the quality nature tours within Sweden. (SES et al, 2002)

Similar to the ecotourism principles by TIES, Nature’s Best also has six principles which
added the quality and safety criteria, but took away the emphasis on financial benefits and
political concerns:

1. Respect the limitations of the destination – minimize the negative impacts on local nature
   and culture. The tour products should be sensitive to the carrying capacity of the natural
   environment and local community so as to minimize the disturbance.
2. Support the local economy. Approved tour operator is expected to help the development
   of the community, e.g. buying local products and attracting tourists who could contribute
to economic wellbeing of the society.
3. Make all of the operators’ activities environmentally sustainable. The ecotourism operator has to be concerned about the protection of environment throughout the operation.

4. Contribute actively to natural and cultural conservation. The operator is encouraged to support the conservation of the natural environment and local culture, e.g. funding a research on wildlife protection.

5. Promote knowledge, respect and the joy of discovery. The tourists should be provided with knowledge and information about the region by ecotourism operators.

6. Quality and safety all the way. Labeled tours are required to be well organized in a professional way and are trustworthy by the tourists.

(SES et al, 2002; Nature’s Best, 2009)

Under each of the above principles, a list of basic and bonus criteria is set to assess the tour operators and tour products. (See appendix 1) Companies and their products are required to meet all basic criteria and at least ten percent of the bonus criteria in order to have their tours be labeled and become Approved Ecotourism Operator. There are 78 approved tour operators in Sweden at the moment (Nature’s Best, 2009). Among them who meet the higher bonus point could be nominated by Nature’s Best to the “Ecotourism Operator of the Year” at the annual Grand Travel Awards in Stockholm. (SES et al, 2002)

We have been claiming that ecotourism has strong sustainability, in which Nature’s Best is closely aligned. The Nature’s Best is concerned about preserving the natural environment, local culture and community, promoting knowledge to visitors, and performing high in quality tours. Although the goal of Nature's Best does not reach to the degree of very strong sustainability since the aim is still to develop the local economy and to minimize impact on the nature (but not target at zero impact), it does not emphasis the economic consideration in operating tourism business. Therefore, we state that the Nature’s Best has stronger sustainability. The aims are high in the criteria of Nature’s Best, which means that their goal is to strive for having stronger sustainability in ecotourism business.

3.3.3 Ecotourism operators in Sweden

Few recent researches have been done focusing on tour operators in ecotourism. But it is not arguable that tour operators play an important role in the tourism industry. Many theoreticians believe that “the business of tour operators on a large scale can be linked to the phase of modern tourism – that after 1950” (Cavlek, 2005, p.175). According to Cavlek (2005), a British travel firm, Horizon Holidays, is recognized as the first tour operator. It organized the first inclusive tourist tour in 1950 following a pre-arranged package based on a charter flight which began the introduction of tour operators into the tourism system.

In Sweden, there are 78 approved ecotourism operators in Sweden nowadays. However, it is worth to note that the actual number of ecotourism operators could be different since the tour operators are not compulsory to apply for the quality label. There could be some operators running their business and complying with all criteria in Nature’s Best, but they just do not apply for the label. Therefore, the actual number of tour operators who could be regarded as ecotourism operators is unknown. In this paper, ecotourism operator refers only to those tour operators certified by Nature’s Best in the Swedish context. Since they have organized tours which have been labeled and approved, these operators have been assessed by Nature’s Best and are supposed to work aligning with the principles of ecotourism.
3.3.3.1 Ecotourism operators’ characteristics

From the record of Nature’s Best (2009), ecotourism operators in Sweden offer a wide variety of eco-tours (i.e. tour which got the label from Nature’s Best), such as cycling, nature trails, rafting, bird watching, horse riding, dog sledding, Sami culture experiencing, etc. Their locations are spread all over Sweden. The company size of them is ranged from one to twenty annual permanent employees, with seasonal workers not more than twenty people. According to the definition by European Commission (2003), which is also adopted in Sweden by Nutek, company with staff headcount less than 50 is regarded as small size enterprise. An enterprise is defined as an entity in which economic activity is existing, which can include family firms, associations, partnerships etc. The headcount consists of full-time, part-time and seasonal hired staff, also the owners working as managers, partners engaged in everyday activity and other people who are employed under national law. Therefore, many of the ecotourism operators within Sweden are small size enterprises. (European Commission, 2003)

3.3.3.2 Business Purpose

There are many different characteristics of a small business compared to a large firm. Carter (1996 in Page et al, 1999) compared the two sizes of firms in terms of management differences. Small firms were described as having a short horizon of planning, little knowledge on the surrounding business environment, personalized impacts on strategy and management, informal and loose ways of communication, information sharing and job description. Also, the management skills are many and not as specified as in a large firm, and the personal motivations influence the firm more compared to the large firm which, has broader perspective on performance. (Carter, 1996 in Page et al, 1999) Small firms are also acknowledged as lacking in resources both financially and in human resource, and at the same time working in order to prosper and be profitable. (Lovlock, 1991; Ogders, 1998; in Morrison & Teixeira, 2004; Morrison, 1998; Storey, 1994)

Research has shown that a large number of small firms do not want to grow (Hamilton & Lawrence, 2001; Webster, 1998), instead the small firms prefer to survive and continue functioning as small firms (Webster, 1998). This is applicable on the tourism sector as well (Shaw and Williams, 1994; Thomas et al, 1998, in Webster, 1998). Considering that a high percentage of the Swedish business consists of micro to small businesses, the implication of not wanting to grow may have it impacts on the society. As small firms are viewed as creating new jobs and also contributing with increased competition on the market, the importance of the growth among small firms is apparent. (Hamilton & Lawrence, 2001)

It has been found that owners and founders of micro and small firms become self-employed for different reasons. A few examples of reasons are discussed by Webster (1998), which is the aim of independence and the possibility to earn more than being hired by any other. (Hakim in Webster, 1998) Also, the self-employment and responsibility of own business is a life-style decision and growth. (Williams et al, in Webster, 1998) Running a small firm could also be a purpose of gaining extra money, and therefore having small business on the side contributes additional income. The purposes of starting-up a company and the purpose of running it may differ between owners, although it may be a more personal matter when the leader is running his own business compared to bigger firm (Webster, 1998; Smallbone et al, 1995).

According to our thesis, we are aiming at identifying dilemmas and acknowledging the handling of dilemmas. By studying the purpose of their business, it helps to explain the occurrence of dilemmas from ecotourism operator’s perspective. The business purpose could
also be the reason for them to involve in ecotourism. Their main concern among the three sustainable components, business economic, environmental and social aspects, would lead to their different attitude and behavior when they face the dilemma, and hence affect the strength of sustainability of ecotourism.

3.4 Ecotourism from three perspectives

As we have mentioned previously, ecotourism embraces large concern about the natural and cultural environment. But at the same time, we cannot ignore the importance of supporting the local communities socially and economically that are all merits of developing ecotourism. Referring to the sustainable development concept, ecotourism is considered to possess strong sustainability. From the definition and principles of ecotourism, we found that the positive impacts brought from ecotourism can be grouped into three main perspectives: environmental, social and economic. The environmental perspective is concerned of protecting the nature from misuse and damage and therefore, be sustainable for the future. While social perspective highlights the importance of preserving the local culture and strengthens the local community’s pride and cohesiveness. The third perspective, the economic perspective of a tour operator, is aiming for economical feasibility. (Choi and Sirakaya, 2006) Now we are going to discuss how ecotourism can be beneficial in different aspects.

3.4.1 Environment perspective

One of the main concerns of ecotourism is from the environmental conservation advantages. The perspective of the environment concerns with sustaining the physical wellbeing of physical resources. The knowledge of biosystems, that are sensitive for damage, multiple use and destructions, will diminish in the long run. (Becken & Hay, 2007) Environmental conservation in this context refers also to the protection of natural environment as well as the wildlife inhabitants. Nature and climate have been important resources for some conventional tourism destinations; and of course are especially essential for ecotourism. Nature and tourism industry in general are influential to each other. The future change in environment and nature might cause damage to exotic destinations, and lead to vanishing of tourism. Factors such as industrialization, globalization, non-renewable resources and environmental pollutants and greenhouse gases are a few examples on non-sustainable environment in the future. (Crane and Matten, 2007) The growth of tourism industry might also lead to the increase of the climate change and damaging natural environment (Budeanu, 2005). For instance, global tourism accounts for the green house effects caused by the emission of gases from transportation (Gössling & Hall, 2008). Some popular and exciting sites in developing countries become highly populated and therefore face a danger of degradation and destruction. Tourists compete with the local inhabitant for resources, such as water, food, land and breeding habitat, which lead to overexploiting the resources of the tourist destination and an increased pollution, waste and land degradation. (Budeanu, 2005) The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) estimated that the environmental impact of a 2-week holiday accounted for 20-50% of one person’s consumption and generation of waste in one year (WWF, 2002).

Focusing on ecotourism, Leung (et al, 2009) has summarized some recent investigations, from 1996 to 2005, on natural resource impacts of ecotourist activities. He found out that there are an increasing number of empirical studies on ecological impacts of ecotourist activities in destination areas, for example the site deterioration occurring along trails and campsites due to hiking and camping activities (Leung et al, 2009). It seems that certain kinds of tourist activities would unavoidably have impact on the natural environment. But the underlining concept of ecotourism is to minimize the negative impacts on nature and to raise the
awareness and knowledge of conserving the environment throughout the whole eco-tour experience. Therefore, comparing to the conventional tourism, ecotourism is expected to have less or even ideally no negative impact on the natural environment. In addition, ecotourism could also bring long term benefit to nature by promoting awareness of environmental issues.

As studies showed the tourism activities could have negative impacts on nature, limiting the number of visitors is one way to minimize damages to the environment. (Honey, 1999) In other words, it will be better to the natural environment if less tourism activities are taken place in the area. In Sweden, considering the large nature coverage within the whole country, it is not hard to claim that tourism activities would more or less have impacts on the environment. Ecotourism operators in Sweden play an extraordinary important role in conserving the environment in action. From their internal operation of business; through designing tours which are the best to the nature; to the process of guiding tours and monitoring tourist activities; these can all contribute to the environment under operators’ control.

3.4.2 Social perspective
The interpretation and focus within social perspective in different context could be very diverse. As we have discussed before, researches regarding to ecotourism have been heavily concentrating on developing countries. Generally speaking, social perspective is concerned with achieving social justice, and therefore aims to achieve equity between rich and poor, women and men, old and young (Crane and Matten, 2007). The United Nations proclaimed that 80% of the world’s gross domestic product belongs to the developed countries with 1 billion people, while the remaining 20% belongs to the poor inhabitants of the world and the developing countries, which consists of 5 billion people (UN 2005: 12 in Crane and Matten, 2007). In the context of tourism, tourists are usually more favorable to transporting from more developed countries to less developed destination. Therefore, the main concern of the social perspective in tourism worldwide is to create equity and justice. However, at different destination, tourism activities may have various distinct impacts on the local communities which should be paid attention on, especially in ecotourism.

There are a number of unwilling social impacts that can accompany tourism development both in the developed and in the developing world (UN, 1999c). This argument is supported by Hunter and Green (1995 in Budeanu, 2005) who claim that the inhabitants of the local community might find the high life standard of the tourist aggravating and frustrating, which lead to dissatisfaction and discomfort among the residents. A phenomenon called ‘relative deprivation’ (Hunter and Green, 1995 in Budeanu, 2005). Among the most common and prevalent social impacts of tourism that have caused concern involve the image of the destination, the exploitation of vulnerable persons, capacity considerations, localized benefits and costs, and health. (UN 1999c)

Tourism has positive social impacts on the social development and modernization by contributing to employment creation, worker training and the development of small- and medium sized enterprises. Also, the increasing participation of local communities encourages the joint responsibilities between public institutions and the private sector. (UN, 1999c) Tourism also benefits the enlightening awareness of the local culture, improved life standard and preservation of local culture (Budeanu, 2005). These are all included into the advantages which ecotourism is striving to achieve. For the case of Sweden, where tourism is mainly based on wildlife and ecotourism, rural community development has been benefited (UN,
In our study, we see the culture and rural community in Sweden are the key concerns in the social perspective. The degree of the social impacts depends on a range of factors, for instance, the type and rate of tourism growth, the ratio of visitors to members of the resident community, seasonal trends and the sociocultural resilience of the host community as well as the differing characteristics of visitors. (UN, 1999c) Just as what we have discussed in environmental perspective, ecotourism operators in Sweden can help contributing the society by planning and controlling their business carefully concerning the impacts on local community.

3.4.3 Economic perspective

Conventionally, economic aspect is the main concern for most of the companies especially for big corporations. Problems in other aspects occur when: “the players have short-term perspective and are unlikely to embrace future-oriented issues, especially if they perceive these as a threat to their own priorities” (Ioannides, 2009, p.53). If a company wants to achieve a sustainable business, it should not focus on pursuing short-term goals, but instead aim for a long-term profit and slow but stable growth, this in a way for growing gradually. The companies’ attitudes and behavior have the biggest impact on the economic perspective, since their way of working influence the sustainability of the industry. (Crane and Matten, 2007) The same phenomenon can also happen in the tourism industry context.

In the tourism industry, private sector tourism companies, including tour operators, have crucial roles in implementing the sustainable tourism imperative. Tourism businesses can influence the nature of tourism activity directly by modifying the products they offer and the methods they use in producing them (UN, 1999a). They bring along some positive impacts on the economic development, such as income generation, improvement of economic structure of a region and encouragement of entrepreneurial activity (Mathieson and Wall, 1982, in Vanhove, 2005). These can also be main benefits which are resulted from promoting ecotourism in some less economically developed regions. Even in highly developed countries, Sweden in this case, economic concern of ecotourism operators cannot be ignored in order to stay sustainable.

The degree of the above impacts varies from different destinations even within the same country. They are depended on the nature of the main facility and its attractiveness; the volume and intensity of expenditure; the level of economic development in the destination; the size of the economic based of the destination; the degree to which tourist expenditures recirculate within the destination; and the degree to which the destination has adjusted to the seasonality of tourist demand. (Mathieson and Wall, 1982, in Vanhove, 2005) Another main factor which influences the possible impacts is the player’s expectation and the business purpose. The majority of ecotourism operators in Sweden are small companies. Quite a number of approved ecotourism operators even report only one annual employee. (Nature’s Best, 2009) Entrepreneurial and small companies are more likely to have main business goals and objectives which differ from economical growth, which is usually the main concern for a big company. However, at least a threshold economical target should still be set to achieve a sustainable business.

3.5 Ecotourism operator dilemma

We have just talked about the possible positive outcomes from three different perspectives in ecotourism. The ideal result from ecotourism is of course to strive for the most advantages to
all perspectives without any harm in any aspect. However in reality, pursuing different interests usually creates conflicts. Even in cases of no direct conflicts occur, people could face dilemma in choosing which one or more among various dimensions to benefit within the limited resources. Based on previous discussion, we are now going to introduce some possible dilemma among the three main perspectives in ecotourism, i.e. environmental, social and economic.

3.5.1 Environmental/Economic dilemma
Considering the beneficial outcomes from economic perspective, generating income is probably the most obvious and the easiest measurable advantage. The most conventional thought of achieving it is to attract more customers. In ecotourism context, tour operators can earn higher income by increasing the number of visitors joining their tours with profitable tour prices. This is already conflicting with the environmental perspective. More visitors would be more likely to cause damages, not only to the destination environment, but might also harm the environment on the way, e.g. travelling by car or airplane which cause pollution. But setting limit to number of visitors can indicate that the ceiling of economic benefit is restricted, at least in short run.

Of course from sustainability point of view, conserving nature is essential in long run especially in ecotourism which is depending heavily on the quality of nature. The two perspectives have interdependent relationship. Just as Budeanu (2005) indicates that the economic benefits can cause problems for the environment which is not always apparent for the industry. The consequences of the economic benefits may endanger the tourism industry because of its damage to nature and cultures, which is for tour operators destructing their business (Budeanu, 2005). However, even if ecotourism operators are willing to consider a long term perspective, they could still be in an ambiguous situation. For instance, different people and organizations may have different opinions on the acceptable capacity of tourism activities on a particular destination. There may not be a definite right or wrong answer, but more a matter of degree. Different entities could interpret the tolerant level of tourism impacts on nature differently. Also, the damages caused by tourism activities are usually noticed only after the environment has already been destroyed.

The violation of environmental interests as a result of economic growth in tourism is more obvious in destinations with large number of visitors, especially in developing countries. This could be because the environmental protection conscious for both tourists and local communities is low; and people from those destinations usually perceive a higher need of economic growth over environmental conservation. In Sweden, people generally enjoy spending their leisure in nature and have high awareness of environmental issues. But on the other hand, Sweden is known for its high living cost and standard among the world. A significant economical concern is essential in long run. Therefore, with business closely related to nature, ecotourism operators are expected to face certain degree of dilemma between environmental and economic perspectives.

3.5.2 Economic/Social dilemma
The relationship between economic and social perspectives in ecotourism is also interdependent. They can be beneficial to each other considering the good results from developing ecotourism in some cases. For instance, ecotourism attracts incoming visitors who can bring not only profit, but also employment and business opportunities. Rural areas can be benefited by more inhabitants accompany with better infrastructure regionally. In Sweden,
people are moving out from countryside to more developed cities. Ecotourism can be a surviving tool for local people living or even attract some residents back to the region.

Despite that the growth of ecotourism could benefit in both economic and social perspectives in some cases, other conflicts and problems also exist. One of the problems is the foreign-owned tour operators which lead to an outflow of financial means and foreign exchange flowing out of the country, leading to the society not gaining any profit for the tourist activities. Another problem is the seasonal work with low wages or a guarantee for future work, especially in Sweden where most of the ecotourism activities are seasonal. (Budeanu, 2005) According to the principles of ecotourism, benefits should be retained at the environment and local community. The first problem just mentioned is not only happened for foreign-owned tour operators but also for those tour operators which are not locally-owned in ecotourism. Employees should also be hired locally. Although stable employment is good to the society, hiring full time annual employees with seasonal demand only is highly economically unfeasible. Referring to Gilmore (et al, 2007), the main approach of the economic and social perspective is to create economic benefits and support a growing tourism industry. Employment, revenue and interactions between tourist and local inhabitants are the main goals of these perspectives (Witt, 1991 in Gilmore et al 2008). Also, the outcome is a larger inflow of tourist exchange which contributes to a higher GDP and could lead to a large-scale tourism (Gilmore et al, 2007). However, it is at the same time contradicting the principle of ecotourism which is supposed to be in small scale in order to minimize the impact on nature.

As mentioned previously, some negative social impacts, such as disrupting the local cultures and traditions, can be occurred due to the increasing number of visitors, which is associated with the economic value brought to the destination from economic perspective. Similar to the environmental/economic dilemma, there are also conflicts between social and economic interests. The more the number of visitors, the better for the economy, but the higher the possibility of disturbance would occur to the local community and its culture.

3.5.3 Social/Environmental dilemma

Social and environment are the main concerns in ecotourism. The best situation will happen when the whole society is willing to put nature in the first priority and contributes to environmental conservation. But in practice, people would have different expectation for lives. Concerning the social benefits associated with the growth of tourism, the local society would develop facilities to support their desire outcome from the growth. But the growth of tourism will also put pressure on existing natural resources (UN, 1999b & 1999c). This problem is more serious in developing countries where some natural resources are scarce. Sweden is a highly developed country with sparse population. People are less likely to compete with each other for natural resources, such as clean water and land space. However, there are still dilemma between the social and environmental perspectives which occur in different aspects and levels. As we have just mentioned regarding to the benefits of better facilities and infrastructure development to meet the growth of ecotourism, this is good for the local society in the creation of jobs and improvement of living standard. But these developments will also disturb the nature more or less, such as the increase of residents who might pollute the environment and take up land and natural resource.

In Sweden, there are some local societies which depend heavily on the forestry industry. The growth of ecotourism and environmental concerns may cause a disruption of their social employment structure. The pressure on environmental protection to the forestry industry may
lead to the closure of business and eventually create unemployment. Even if people are willing to change their living to ecotourism operation, the capacity of ecotourism industry might not be able to absorb a large scale of employment transformation. Another difficulty in environmental protection which ecotourism may face could be coming from the social right in Sweden. The protection of natural environment by controlling the number of visitors or charging entrance fees cannot be easily implemented in Sweden since the Right of Public Access is equally applicable to everyone. If the incoming visitors are not joining any tour operating locally, their access to the nature cannot be restricted or monitored. In this case, even if the local societies and the ecotourism operators concern the natural environment, they have little responsibility and power to prevent the negative impacts on nature caused by too many visitors.

3.6 Managing and balancing dilemmas in ecotourism

As we have discussed previously, achieving ecotourism complies with strong sustainability. In order to achieve a sustainable development, the three components, economic, environmental and social aspects, are needed to be balanced (WCED, 1987). The same case in ecotourism, conflicts and dilemma among the three perspectives also needed to be solved. There are a lot of researches on sustainable development in tourism suggesting the solutions in managing and balancing conflicts from the governmental perspective. As stated in a UN document, “Much more can be done to optimize the benefits from tourism and to limit negative impacts. Such actions will require a coordinated approach of governments, the private sector, workers’ and employers’ organizations, nongovernmental organizations and international agencies. Government can initiate policy interventions...” (UN, 1999c, p.5).

Ecotourism operator is a small player within the tourism industry. Their level of involvement in tourism policy planning is very limited. Few studies have been done regarding to the ways of achieving sustainable tourism from ecotourism operators’ perspective. But in fact, they together play a very important role in sustaining the ecotourism industry. Managing a tourism balance in practice is reviewed by Gilmore (et al, 2008). They created a framework for a tour operator in order to plan and manage tourism in a sustainable way. Infrastructure is concerned with providing the tourists good transportation means, accommodation, catering facilities and site facilities. The facilities and revenue earning activities will provide with not only short-term earnings, but also in the long-run sustainable economic development. (Gilmore et al, 2008)

Communicating and promoting the region and destinations are two ways of achieving attention and interest among the tourists. Gilmore (et al, 2008) claimed that by promoting the destination to a major target group is a major challenge. Many of the tour operators usually use the most famous site in promoting the region. Despite outward communication, the on-site communication is the most important communication to spread to tourists. Signs and information at the destination help informing the tourists. The fourth component is sustainable maintenance, which includes taking care of the region, such as maintaining nature and key attractions that is highly populated. Also, information and education need to be provided for the tourists in order for them to act in a sustainable way. (Gilmore et al, 2008)

Gilmore (et al 2007) state that tour operators do not focus on each one of the perspectives at once, and instead focus on some or just one perspective to fulfill. Therefore, the perspectives are not balanced even though academic research claims that this is needed for sustainable development. Their study provides us some general ideas on how the tour operators can work
better towards sustainable development. He also noticed that tour operators’ focus differs from one to another. (Gilmore et al, 2007) Some other factors such as limited practical application in the areas of management, planning and monitoring systems at the local level (Butler, 1999) may also have different effect on how to cope with sustainability. In practice it is hard to balance the three perspectives (social, environment and economic) in tourism industry (Gilmore et al, 2008).

3.7 Summary

The past chapter has explored and presented a few definitions, characteristics and concepts from findings of other researches. An insight in the tourism industry has been provided to understand the size globally and in Sweden; and define and categorize the concept. The chapter has moved on to present and discuss sustainable development, by which four degrees of measuring sustainability have been highlighted, and then sustainable development in tourism. This follows by identifying and clarifying the concept of ecotourism. Ecotourism in Sweden and the quality label of Nature’s Best have been covered specifically. The ecotourism operator has been defined and applied to the Swedish context of their characteristics and small firm’s business purpose. The following part is ecotourism from three perspectives which concerns with highlighting each perspective’s advantages and disadvantages. Having declared each one of the perspectives separately, interaction between them is highlighted in order to identify dilemmas based on previous researches. Managing and balancing dilemmas in ecotourism is the last part of the theoretical framework which presents the research done on how tour operators achieve sustainability by their actions.

Before we move on to the next section, it is worth to note that with the support of limited existing literatures, we have built up the basic understanding and our own arguments as the foundation of this study. More details will be explained in the next chapter of research design.
4. Research Design

The chapter of research design is aiming to describe the practical methodology used in this thesis. The method for selecting interviewees in order to gather information and the making of interview guide, the interviews, and also the size of fallout is provided. We end this chapter with a critical analysis on our choice of method and the information provided from the respondents.

4.1 Research strategy
Our thesis is carried out as a qualitative study consisting of interviews with top managers/owners of ecotourism operator companies, which we have stated before. Since our purpose is to study ecotourism operators’ perceptions on economic, social and environmental dilemmas in ecotourism from a broader view as well as how they manage the dilemmas, focus should not be put on the comparisons of business performance among the respondents. Instead, we want to find out if there are common and also particular practices in dealing with the dilemmas in the Swedish context. Despite that, we acknowledge that there could be many factors such as geographical location which would influence their views on the three perspectives (environmental, social and economic), the situations and the dilemmas among them. A case study is defined by Bryman & Bell (2005) as an organization or company that is the focus for the study of gathering information. Further, Bryman & Bell (2005) explains that the case study is concerned on gathering information about certain characteristics or special findings for the specific cases. Considering the complexity in the industry, we expected ecotourism operators in Sweden are facing a different kind and level of difficulties from each other when running the business. In other words, situation in ecotourism is case sensitive. Our thesis therefore consists of several case studies which are aiming for findings about the common practice, but also something that is extraordinary and unique in each of the cases. In order to answer our research question of how ecotourism operators manage dilemmas in the ecotourism industry, the final results are expected to have a certain degree of generality.

4.2 Methods of data collection
Different cases might have similarity and differences; and hence we are trying to find out their common and specific perspectives, as well as actual behaviors. To achieve this, we finally interviewed eight different ecotourism operators which are scattered across the whole Sweden. We will further, in detail, explain the methods for finding interviewees, the interview process and the interview guide in the following sections.

4.2.1 Selecting interviewees
We find it more appropriate to choose heterogeneous companies since we do not have rich previous studies on ecotourism operator to rely on, which indicates that in depth interviews are preferred (Saunders, 2007). However, due to the limitation on time and financial concerns, large scale and long term study are not possible to be executed. As a result, the choice of respondents in this study is undertaken by non-probability case selection so as to make sure more apparent heterogeneous respondents could be chosen. For instance, considering the population distribution and geographical differences in such a long country as Sweden, different locations within the country could have quite distinct characteristics in terms of for example culture, population, economical situation and activities. Therefore, we try to include
respondents from different locations within the country. The other main selection criterion is the type of tours which ecotourism operators have been organizing. Tours of horse riding and kayaking are probably facing quite different problems and advantages, which is the aim of trying to find comparable and common ways of doing things even though they are spread throughout Sweden and are working with different tours.

All the respondents are chosen from the list of approved ecotourism operators from the Nature’s Best website. As we have mentioned before, the reason is that Nature’s Best is the only quality label in Sweden certifying the tours in ecotourism. It is launched by the Swedish Ecotourism Society and Swedish Travel and Tourism Council, which are the two main authorities related to ecotourism. In addition, the certification is recognized and recommended by WWF. Those ecotourism operators approved by Nature’s Best are therefore believed that their tour operations align with what ecotourism is supposed to be, in Sweden at least. Additionally, some of the chosen respondents have received the Ecotourism Operator of the Year Award by the Ecotourism Association and Grand Travel Award. Therefore, we are also trying to identify their specific strengths behind the success which could imply that these ecotourism operators have a more advanced or a more carefully worked out system for ecotourism.

To summarize, the criteria for us to choose respondents of ecotourism operators are as follow:

- Located in different places in Sweden
- Award-winners or not
- Operating different kinds of tours

Having decided a list of target respondents, we started to contact the chosen respondents. We used the Nature’s Best website in order to get information on the companies and the contact persons’ names and numbers; and the companies’ websites were also visited to get more information on each one of them depending on the information they provided with. This was pursued in a way to ensure that the respondents were heterogeneous.

We contacted the respondents in Swedish and informed them our intention, the purpose of our thesis; and asked if they are interested in participating in our study by letting us interviewing them. In total we called 21 companies, and eight respondents agreed to participate. The amount of respondents was decided upon the amount of information we gathered was fulfilled. In other words, when we realize that the information gained from the interview starts repeating from the old ones, we could stop arranging new interviews (Wallén, 1996). Therefore, we booked some interviews on beforehand and decided to interview a few more when we realize that the information is not enough. The reason for not involving other companies in the study will be explained in the loss of cases section below.

Our eight companies are located in different places in Sweden (see figure 2), which are
either award-winners (marked * in figure 2) or not, and also operating different kinds of tours. Additionally all of the interviewees are tour operator managers or owners. The aim of achieving different kinds of companies is successful and the study could collect information from the respondents. More detail background information of the companies will be presented in the next chapter.

4.2.2 The interviews

Connected to our problem statement, we are aiming at studying ecotourism operators across Sweden. With limited time and resources, we are not able to arrange face to face interviews with all the respondents. Therefore, telephone interview has been considered as the alternative method to us. However, in order to ensure comparability of the findings from each of them, we decide to conduct telephone interview with all of the interviewees. Telephone is also the first contacting mean with the respondents. Its advantages are timely and reduction on the impact of our behavior and physical presence on the respondent which is preferable (Bryman & Bell, 2005). Though, we are aware that the loss of information through non-verbal communication could be a downside for a telephone interview. So at the beginning, we were in a dilemma that we had to choose from having face to face interviews with several companies locating in the same region of Sweden; and having telephone interviews with companies which could be from diversified background and geographical location. Additionally, the respondents have their own companies to take care of; and depending on whether their business are in the high season or not, the available time for respondent can vary. Regarding to the language media, although one of us does not speak Swedish and the thesis would be written in English, we decide to let the respondents choose to participate in the interview in Swedish if they do not feel comfortable to have the interview in English. They could also switch the language during the interview if needed. Out of eight interviews, a total of five interviews are hold in English and the rest were in Swedish. We will discuss this further under the critique on choice of method.

4.2.2.1 The interview guide

The interview is designed as semi-structured, which means that we structure a frame of major themes to cover during the interview (Bryman & Bell, 2005). By doing so, we find that it is important for the respondent to feel free to answer in his or her own way (Bryman & Bell, 2005). On the other hand, we also keep a level of openness for any new insight from the respondents, which is the advantage of semi-structured interviews, since the respondents feel free to answer in their own way, but at the same time the interview is somewhat structured. Our exploratory study is looking for new information within the field of ecotourism in Sweden, where the semi-structured interview is an appropriate method in finding new insights (Saunders, 2007), which is also the reason for using the method.

The interviews are conducted differently in terms of language, which means for the three interviews which are held in Swedish, only one of us is responsible for the interview. For the interviews performed in English, we use a panel interview which means that both of us participate in the interview but only one of us has the main responsibility (Kylén, 2004). The other would complement and add questions if one feels that are needed. By doing this, we could cover the information that could have been missed if not using the method, which was the case of the first interview we hold. The interviews held in Swedish by one interviewer and the same first interviewee is contacted a second time to ask for complementary information which was missed during the first interview.
When outlining the interview guide and adding themes and questions, we base the questions on our theoretical framework in order to connect findings with the existing studies, which is a research approach of deduction. Additionally we expected to find some new information in which we could not support from the researches done already, which is connected to the research approach of induction and the implications of the gap in research and knowledge in the area.

The interview guide (see appendix 2) consists of mainly 33 questions, which are divided into five themes. We started the interview with background information about the company such as the year started of the tour operating company, the origin of the customers, numbers of tours, other existing business than the company etc. This was in a way to get more in depth information about them, and which could not be gained by only visiting their website or Nature’s best’s website.

The second theme is concerned with ecotourism in general and also getting knowledge on Nature’s Best’s criteria and importance. We also wanted to know if the respondent had observed any change in the surrounding area, and if the changes could be connected to tourism in any sense. The third theme we asked questions related to the three perspectives of economy, social and environment. By this we could get information on the benefits in each perspective that could be brought from ecotourism. We concluded this part by asking if there is any conflict between the perspectives in a way to start the fourth theme. The fourth theme is concerned with finding the dilemmas and also receiving the information about how the ecotourism operator handles the dilemmas. The last and fifth theme is a part of more specific questions, which is concerned with gaining knowledge on how they solve things in practice. By viewing these things we could easier understand the management of the ecotourism operator.

Before finalizing the interview guide used in the interviews, we tried out the questions and themes on test persons. By doing this we could be aware of the weaknesses and strengths of the interview guide to some extent and which questions we needed to improve, delete and develop. Even though we have tested the questions, the interviewees experienced difficulties in some questions by understanding the meaning of them which we will discuss further in the critique on choice of method. As we think that it could be a problem for the interviewees to respond instantly over the telephone, we decided to send out the interview guide to all respondents at least one or two day before the interview through e-mail. We encouraged them to read through our proposed questions for the interview in advance so that they would be prepared and understand what questions we would ask during the interview.

We recorded all of the interviews for our own sake to transcribe and summarize the information later. By using the recorder we could feel relaxed and focused on the interview, since we did not have to worry too much about loosing any essential information. All interviews are undertaken with the agreement of displaying the real name of the respondents in our final paper. The table 4 below is an overview of the interviews that took place in terms of when, who, how long and what language is used. For the ease of reading, we will use the abbreviation of company name (i.e. respondent code in the table 4) in the discussion throughout the rest of the paper. The abbreviations will also be used to replace the names of interviewees when they represent the company to express their opinions.
Table 4: The interviews (*) - complementary interview

We had similar ways of organizing each of the interviews. The first contact was always in Swedish and the respondent received the question if we were allowed to include their company names in the study, which has been approved by all. Before the interview starts, we reminded them the purpose of the study and asked the interviewees if they had any question. Some of them had read through the interview guide in advance but some had not. We went through the structure and flow of the interview quickly with all of them to let them feel more prepared. We finished each interview by asking if the respondent had any further questions to us and if we could contact them to get more information if it was necessary. In the following, each interview is presented shortly in order to give specific information about the process.

4.2.2.2 Interview 1: Rid i Jorm (RJ)

This first interview, we had technical problem with the conference phone which led to the interview started 20 minutes later. Although the respondent still had time to be interviewed a bit later, we acknowledge that the delay could affect the outcome of the interview both in terms of stress and anxiousness. As table 4 shows, this interview was among the shortest interview, which needed a follow-up by complementary questions.

The respondent said she had slightly read through the interview guide before the interview, which we came to realize that sending out the interview guide on beforehand helped the interviewee to prepare and think about the question. The observation we could do over phone was the amount of time the interviewee paused for thinking in order to answer the question, which RJ did and indicated that she took her time to reflect about the questions.

Since we thought there was some lack of information which we could get from the respondent, we found it important to do the second interview as agreed before for a second short interview if it is necessary. We did not observe that the person felt disturbed or bothered, but instead the same talkative behavior from the interviewee.

4.2.2.3 Interview 2: Fjällhästen (FH)

As with the first interview (RJ), this interview was also held in Swedish. The respondent had read the interview guide and mentioned before starting the interview that she could not understand some of the questions in the guide. We said that we would explain them during the interview when the questions would appear.

From what we could observe from the interview was that she was willing to think through the questions before answering. She found the questions on identifying dilemmas were very difficult but still tried to answer in the best way as she could.
4.2.2.4 Interview 3: The Silent Way (SW)
The owner whom we expected to interview with had some sudden issues to take care of at the appointed time. Instead we got to interview the other owner who was unprepared. Although the respondent did not have time to read the interview guide beforehand and the interview was held in English, he did not seem to have difficulties in understanding the questions and could answer the questions without spending too much time in thinking. The interviewee was also keen to give information and detailed answers to our questions.

4.2.2.5 Interview 4: Stockholm Adventures (SA)
This interview was held in English. The respondent had read through the interview guide beforehand but was not sure about our purpose of the study as he had had many interviews in a short period of time that he might mix up the interviews.

During the last 10 minutes of the interview we heard some background noise from the telephone which might be coming from the respondent doing something else at the same time. This implies that the focus was somewhat disturbed and the concentration had been distracted. The respondent mentioned in the end of the interview that he would prefer to have face to face interview, as telephone interview makes communication more difficult.

4.2.2.6 Interview 5: Vildmark i Värmland (VV)
This interview started about 30 minutes later than the appointed time due to the busy schedule of the respondent. The interview was held in English and with some use of Swedish words during the interview. The respondent hadn’t read through the entire interview guide in advance. The interviewee was curious about how we would use the information from the interview in the paper.

In the middle of the interview, the respondent’s mobile phone rang two times and the interview had to pause. The finishing time of the interview had therefore delayed by around 40 minutes. Although the respondent was very willing to answer our questions throughout the interview, the last 15 minutes of time seemed to be stressful.

4.2.2.7 Interview 6: Landskapet JO (LJ)
The interview started 15 minutes later because the respondent was not present when we called him the first time. The interview started a quarter to seven in the evening. The respondent had read the interview guide very quick before the interview, and he did not think it was difficult to read English but instead to answer in English in which the quality might not be as good as it would be in Swedish. Therefore, the interview was held in Swedish.

The respondent mentioned that he had been educated in the field of ecotourism at the university indicating that he had a lot of knowledge in the academic field as well. He also mentioned that he might talk too much and answer in such a way that would be out of focus for our questions. Therefore, we did find the answers were difficult to figure out sometimes. This interview was the longest one among all, and it could have been even longer. Towards the end of the interview we felt that we were in a hurry of trying to get all the answers for the questions. This could make an impact on the final outcome in which we will criticize later.

4.2.2.8 Interview 7: Naturupplevelser i Lappland (NL)
We reached the respondent five minutes later than the appointing time due to some technical problem of our rented conference phone. The respondent also informed us that he could only have 30 minutes for the interview. We asked if it would be better to schedule another time for the interview but he replied that the interview could start and he would try to manage it. The
interview carried on in English. He had read through the interview guide before the interview and had that in hand referring during the interview. Due to the limitation on time, we started the interview questions right away. We felt a little bit stressful and some follow-up questions were missed.

When finishing the interview about 38 minutes later, the interviewee wanted to confirm the information we had got from him and we therefore sent him the summary of the interview afterwards. This was a new request to us which we did not have from other interviewees. We sent the summary and the respondent deleted and added a few things. This could be beneficial to our study since the interviewee had more time to reflect on our interview questions.

4.2.2.9 Interview 8: MCraft.se (MC)

The final interview was also held in English. Throughout the interview, the respondent was talkative and he paused and thought before he answered some questions. He had read the interview guide which was also in front of him.

In the end of the interview, he mentioned that he had another meeting and expected that the interview would only take 40 minutes. By then we had been talking for one hour already. We apologized and took three more interview questions, which implied that some minor questions were not answered, though we think that we had covered the main part of the interview.

4.3 Loss of cases and answers

Among the list of 78 approved ecotourism operators, we have tried to contact 21 operators: five of them could not be reached; three of them refused to take part in our interview; two were not suitable to be our respondents; three could involve in the study but did not have time during our interview period. For those who could not be reached, the reasons are that no one picked up the phone; line was continuously busy; or ecotourism business has been closed. Those who refused to take part in our interviews claimed that they were too busy; too many different people have contacted them for interview; or did not have time for an interview. The two that were not appropriate to our study were not private owned companies instead were part of a department under a governmental owned organization. Also, they claimed that their main operational concern is not on organizing tours. There was also a company that no longer organized tours in Sweden anymore and that was not certified any longer. We had three other companies that were willing to take part of the interviews but their available appointing date would be too late for our thesis work. One company agreed on being interviewed but later declined because of sickness and trips.

Not only could it be a loss of cases, but also there was in some extent a loss among the questions from the interview guide. We found out that some questions were tougher than others for the interviewees to answer. When we asked generally if there would be conflicts among the three sustainable perspectives (Q.18), most of the respondents could come up with some possible conflicts of interests which could happen on any tour operators in general. However, when we came to the questions of how they, specifically, manage the dilemmas (Q.21-23), most of them could hardly answer instantly. This could be because they had a hard time to identify the dilemmas occurring in their own business and they thought they had already talked about that during the previous question (Q.18) which was in different focus. Most of the respondents, six out of eight, also could not point out if their tours have any negative impacts on the nature and society (Q.27). The reason could also simply be that the questions are difficult to answer.
4.4 Critique on information gained from interviews

We are satisfied with the amount of respondents and ecotourism operators we have involved in the study since information gained from the interviews was in some sense repeated in the final interviews. Therefore, we experience a satisfaction of the amount and gathered information and believe that we have reached fulfillment of the basic understanding on the concepts but at the same time received the special contexts for each respondent.

The results could have been affected by moods and situations of the interviewees. Examples such as the respondent felt stressed or was in a hurry could be two factors that have a negative impact on the interview. It can imply a risk of the interviewee not being able to reflect clearly over the questions and take sufficient time to answer the questions. This can result in negative consequences for the study when it is made harder to explain behaviors and actions because of lack of information.

We can always question on how truthful the respondents have been in the interview, which is something we can only speculate about. This is though something we need to be aware of, since it also may create a wrong perception about the ecotourism operators and therefore result in misleading findings.

The impact by not being anonymous may also affect the quality of the interview, both in a good way and a bad way. The response we obtained from the respondents was that they wanted to have their company name within the study, since it might be beneficial for them. While on the other hand it can restrict them by not wanting to be known for certain information or be exposed in a study in which they cannot control. This may lead to fail of having in-depth interviews and finding the true meaning. Anyhow we believe that the respondents were interested in being part of the study both in being interviewed and showing their company name, we therefore feel that they can stand for what they are saying and answering.

4.5 Critique on choice of method

This critique and evaluation is on our own choice of method. We need to be aware that the choices we make affect the final results in the end which is the reason for analyzing the flaws in our thesis.

We have already been arguing for using the phone interview compared of having face to face interviews. Though, our first attempt was to have face to face interviews as we think that a higher quality and richness of information could be gained by actually meeting a person. Although we have chosen to conduct telephone interviews as the reasons stated before, we acknowledge that we did miss some information for not having the face to face interview. The possible effect on the result is that we cannot observe the respondent’s behavior and physical expression, which made communication more difficult. In addition, we cannot observe the actual environment over the respondent’s side. We cannot judge if they were having the interview in an appropriate venue with or without disturbance around which could also affect the quality of their answers.

We are aware of the implications of the use of language in the interviews. We decided to at least offer the interviewees a possibility to have the interview in English although it risks lowering the quality of answers, since it might be more difficult to answer some questions in English. This was balanced by providing the respondents the possibility to answer also in
Swedish and use one of us for helping with explaining the answer. The implications of having
interviews in Swedish were the lack of using the panel interview and therefore only one of us
was responsible for the interview. The solution was to contact one company a second time for
the missing information.

We have been learning a lot along the way and view this as a process of achieving knowledge
which can be seen from the improvement of quality of the interviews. We are aware that the
first interview might differ in terms of quality compared to the last interview. Out of the first
interview we experienced that we became more prepared for some suitable follow up
questions complementing the main questions which was later applied also on the short
supplementary interview with the first respondent as well. We have also improved in the way
of asking questions; and in the smoothness of the interview flow in general. The outcome of
this might be that the results are different among the respondents, which is almost
unavoidable. The reason for this is that we had interviews and an open way for the
respondents to answer freely which indicates that they have their own perceptions on the
questions and their industry.

We also want to discuss the choice we made on sending out the interview guide before the
interview. Evaluating the impact of sending out the interview guide we believe that it is
positive for the interviewees and for us. The reason is that we acknowledge that the questions
could have been a bit difficult, if respondent was unprepared, because of the complexity and
requirement of interviewee’s reflecting thinking. Although, it might also have a negative
impact on the respondent since the person could have been influenced by other people and
decided to answer in a certain way which might not be their own thoughts. Comparing the
positive and negative sides of sending out the interview guide, we thought that some sort of
preparation was beneficial for the study and the results. In case of being bias or affected by
some other people would be the risk, but at the same time we could make sure we would get
more thoughtful answers and therefore higher quality for our research.

As we have observed earlier, the lengths of interviews are different. This can indicate that we
have got more or less information depending on how much time it took for the interviewee to
answer the questions. Though, some of the respondents were more talkative and wanted to
provide with more information than the others. We could also notice that some of the
interviews started rather late or at different time than the original booked time because of
different reasons. This leads to shorter interview time and creates stressfulness since the
minimized time put pressure on both side to get the information we wanted. Therefore, this
might have an impact of not gaining sufficient information. Even though, the different amount
of time performed, delays and shorten of interviews are factors, we felt free to contact the
companies again for complementary questions if that was needed.

The final remark we would like to highlight is translating the interviews from Swedish to
English. We want to mention that statements in Swedish can at times be hard to translate to
English and therefore the risk of loosing information and meanings of the respondent can be
obvious. A potential solution could have been to send a summary in English to the
respondents who answered in Swedish, which was unfortunately a thought that came to our
minds too late. We do believe that the context and main conclusion from each respondent has
been brought up.
5. Empirics & Analysis

This chapter consists of the empirics result from the interviews and our analysis connecting to the concepts which have been presented in the theoretical chapter. We will first introduce the background of the responding ecotourism operators which is followed by their perception of ecotourism in Sweden. Next, the three perspectives of ecotourism will then be discussed separately and then in pairs to identify the dilemmas among them. Finally, we will try to outline and understand how the ecotourism operators manage the difficult situations.

5.1 Ecotourism operators in Sweden

First of all, we have summarized the basic facts of our eight respondents and listed in a table according to the alphabetical order of their company name as follow:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company code</th>
<th>Company Name and role of interviewee</th>
<th>Company started</th>
<th>No. of label tours</th>
<th>Label gained year</th>
<th>Tour activities</th>
<th>No. of employee</th>
<th>Customer base</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FH</td>
<td>Fjällhästen - Role: owner’s wife and working partner</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Horse riding in mountain; Sami culture</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Domestic (minority from Denmark and England)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LJ</td>
<td>Landskapet JO - Role: sole owner</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Bird watching</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Domestic (majority from south of Sweden; minority from Denmark and Norway)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC</td>
<td>MCraft.se - Role: sole owner</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Mountain biking</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Domestic (majority; minority from Estonia, Finland, Germany, England, South Africa and America)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NL</td>
<td>Naturupplevelser i Lappland - Role: one of the partners</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Hunting</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Domestic (80%; minority from USA, Germany, Austria, Denmark, Norway, Finland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ</td>
<td>Rid i Jorm - Role: owner’s wife and working partner</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Horse riding in mountain</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Domestic (minority from Germany and Holland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>Stockholm Adventures - Role: sole owner</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Kayaking</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Domestic (international visitors is increasing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW</td>
<td>The Silent Way - Role: one of the couple partners</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Dog sledding</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>International (e.g. England, South Africa, USA, other European countries)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VV</td>
<td>Vildmark i Värmland - Role: one of the couple partners</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Timber rafting</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>International (70%; c.g. Netherland, Germany, Switzerland, England)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Respondent company background
As we mentioned before, this study is done by interviewing eight approved ecotourism operators in Sweden in order to understand ecotourism industry from their perspective. Throughout the discussion, we may refer to some specific questions number (Q.) from the interview guide (appendix 2).

5.1.1 Background
The eight respondents are all certified as approved ecotourism operators by Nature’s Best in Sweden. As we have explained in the methodology, they are chosen based on the principle of diversity in terms of geographical location, tour activities and award winning. The main reason for that is to study the attitude and behavior of ecotourism operators in managing their business in different settings.

The responding companies were established in different years. Two of them (FH and VV) with the longest history were started in 1980s. Three respondents (NL, RJ and SW) entered this business from 1993 to 1995. There are two tour operators (LJ and MC) recently founded in 2003. The latest company (SA) was established in 2008; but the owner actually started another company with other partners in 1987. The business of this new company has been separated and brought from the original company. Therefore, we can see that six out the eight respondents have over ten years experience in working with tour operating business. Except for FH and RJ having the same type of eco-tour (horse riding in the mountain), all other respondents are organizing different types of eco-tours. Most of the respondents have more than one labeled tour, but the tours are more or less focusing on the same activities with different durations in term of days of tour. The number of employees was counted according to the European Commission (2003) including the permanent, seasonal and part-time workers. VV has exceptionally large number of employees among the respondents, but actually 18 out of 21 employees are seasonal workers. SW and VV have their customer base mainly from foreign countries and the rest of the respondents have majority of Swedish customers.

5.1.2 Business purpose
The majority of the owners of the respondent business are also the founder of the respective company, except for the current owners of VV was employed by the same company in 1990 and took over the business in 2000 when the original owner retired. Almost all of them started the business for living. They want to survive in the area by running a sustainable business. MC can be considered as one of the exceptions. This company was started in 2003 in the same year of the founder’s participation of the Paris Dakar Race (motorbike race). He built up a strong network throughout the process and got sponsor money for the start of his business and he in return gives lectures, attends conferences and experience sharing. Although he is running the business, he does not feel that he is doing it for money. But he later also mentioned that he want to grow the business a little bit bigger and hire few more people because now he has too much work but too little money back. LJ is another exception of starting tour operation business for living. The company was established at a time without a concrete idea of what to do for the business. But he mentions later that “You have to earn money whatever you do, because otherwise you cannot do the things you want to do”. The current ecotourism part (around 60%) of the business has been formed after a long transformation process. The result shows that all respondents affirm the necessity of economical concern for their business.

None of the interviewees earns income solely by organizing certified eco-tours (by Nature’s Best) throughout the year. All of them (except SW) have other sources of income which could be from operating non-certified tours or other tourism-related business under the same
company name (e.g. FH: snowmobile tour; LJ: motorcycle safari; MC: motorbike tour; NL: fishing tour; RJ: winter conference accommodation; SA: city bike tour; and VV: canoeing trip.); and seven out of eight respondents (not for VV) have other personal business outside the company (e.g. FH: real estate business; LJ: lecturer at university; MC: annual mountain bike racing project; NL: forestry business; RJ: restaurant; SA: travel consultant; and SW: employed by a cafeteria in the summer). This finding may look as if all tour operators cannot survive depending on organizing eco-tours only. But we have to understand that most of the respondents started their business before Nature’s Best was born. They could also have other personal business related to their interest or professional knowledge. Therefore, there is no enough support to argue that people cannot survive on ecotourism alone.

In fact, most of them (NL, RJ, SA, SW and VV) also mention their enthusiasm for the beautiful nature or ecotourism when we first asked their reasons of starting the business. They also express that they are happy with what they are doing related to ecotourism. The founder of SA has started an adventure company in Sweden 25 years ago with other partners. He claims himself as a very “ecotourism” person. What he meant is that he has been very involved in ecotourism since 1990 and working closely with the Swedish Ecotourism Society and Nature’s Best. He brought along the labeled kayaking tour business to start up the new company, SA, for the reason that he wants to focus more on the ecotourism business while the old company still exists as a travel agent. We can see an important element of personal achievement in starting a business from the cases of MC and VV. MC was started out of the opportunity of running the business related to what he is fond on, Dakar Race. VV took over the existing business partly because they wanted to try running a business on their own when the chance came.

The stories behind the owners to start their own company are different, personal reasons and by coincidence in some cases. The different reasons for people to start their own company have been researched and a few of the reasons are gaining extra income, independence, lifestyle, but what is common is the personal matter of starting up a company (Williams et al, 1989; Hakim, 1989, in Webster, 1998; Smallbone et al, 1995). This can be applicable on the existing companies, where independence is the main factor. Also, LJ mentions that the people working in ecotourism are ideological, and by which the industry is not a gold mine but instead requires hard work. RJ also mentioned that you need to be passionate about what you do and have the basic thought in order to provide with sustainable alternatives. These statements from the respondents could be interpreted as the owners and founders of ecotourism companies need to love what they do and believe in it.

Not necessarily a small firm wants to grow (Hamilton & Lawrence, 2001; Webster, 1998). FH mentions that they want to develop the winter activities where they have almost nothing in income during winter; RJ also has plans to expand the winter activities with having winter guiding and hire one person to take care of that; LJ is also considering of making his company bigger by buying a new boat and hiring two people; VV doesn’t want to grow but instead extend the season; SW is planning to develop new activities in the company consisting of fishing during the summer; MC’s plans consist of increasing the mountain bike tours and would therefore need to become a little bigger in order to manage the tours and all. These answers could be viewed as the companies want to grow, at least in some sense. Almost all of them express more or less that they want to have sustainable income in a year round from the ecotourism business. It is apparent as mentioned before that none of them survives only on labeled tours in ecotourism at the moment and they plan to develop their company and season better. But they see their business as a surviving tool and do not aim at growing into much
bigger companies. They are happy staying their business as small firms as Webster (1998) mentions.

5.2 Perception of ecotourism in Sweden

After discussing about the business purpose of ecotourism operators in Sweden, we would like to find out the respondents’ perception of ecotourism industry and the certification, Nature’s Best. We asked questions related to this field which is presented and analyzed below.

5.2.1 Ecotourism definition

In order to understand ecotourism in Sweden, we need to first find out how the ecotourism operators in Sweden perceive the meaning of ecotourism. Therefore, we asked them to explain ecotourism in own words (Q.6). We have helped the interviewees to answer the question by asking a follow-up question of what the differences are between tourism and ecotourism. The following table summarizes the answers from each of the respondents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fjällhästen (FH):</th>
<th>Rid i Jorm (RJ):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Let the money and financial means stay within the area; make use of the local entrepreneurs; care about others’ interests including sami people, guardian of nature; choose transports that are better for the environment. Ecotourism is very concerned with the local society, small-scale.</td>
<td>Ecotourism is explained very well in the brochure (Nature’s Best). It has a good explanation for the concept, since is means that there is a thought and consideration behind everything you do. For the ecotourism, there is a basic thought and a long-term thinking about the future.</td>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ecotourism can be explained by ecology and economy which are interdependent; can be as much environmentally friendly as possible; is supposed to reach a high quality; and give the customer a sense of security since ecotourism cost more money. If there is no economy in the ecological tourism, ecological tourism does not work.</td>
<td>Ecotourism should be about sharing the nature with visitors and be good for the local economy and local people; be small scale; and concern about the environment as much as possible.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MCraft.se (MC):</th>
<th>Silent Way (SW):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ecotourism is good both for the nature and for your business. It has a more focus on actually using the resources and giving something back as well. You give more than you take from the nature. Use natural resource or use the local resources. Keep the area where you used in good shape. Do something for it such as charity and get things going in the area.</td>
<td>Ecotourism is about not to destroy the surrounding area. It thinks about environment and local area. All activities should be in small group, not destroy the nature, and be done locally, such as buying local products. Ecotourism Companies should be able to survive in the area sustainably. They should also talk about ecotourism to other companies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Naturupplevelser i Lappland (NL):</th>
<th>Vildmark i Värmland (VV):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ecotourism is responsible travel. It is a way of travel where people would learn about the destination and the nature. Ecotourism business should also be in smaller size and group</td>
<td>Ecotourism should support the society where it locates and have the environmental concern, small group experience with the surrounding of nature and animal. Ecotourist should be aware of where they travel to and by what means.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: A summary of respondents’ answer on ecotourism

Except for RJ who does not answer the question directly, everyone talks about ‘environment’ or ‘nature’ which reflects the environmental concern in their explanation of ecotourism. Six of them (FH, MC, NL, SA, SW and VV) also include the social concern in their definitions.
using different words, such as local society, culture, destination, local economy, local people, local area. Two of them (MC and LJ) mention the economical aspect of their business in ecotourism. From the instant responses, we can see generally from the ecotourism operators’ perspective that ecotourism has to be something about the natural environment and then concerning the society; and economic aspect in ecotourism is not highlighted in their definitions. Comparing to the definition of ecotourism by TIES (2009), “Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people”, we find that the ecotourism operators’ perception of ecotourism is very close to the TIES definition which is also the definition adopted by Swedish Ecotourism Society. The two most important elements of ecotourism, environment and social (local people), are present in the mind of ecotourism operators in Sweden.

Some respondents talk about the sustainability of ecotourism. NL thinks that ecotourism can bring long term sustainable tourism business. RJ says that it is a long-term thinking about the future. SW also mentions that ecotourism companies should be able to survive sustainably. From their point of view, ecotourism is also closely related to sustainability. A very pure thought from MC is that “the overall outcome from ecotourism is to make a better world. If you get people to do things in an ecotourism way and people have fun and they get a little bit educated along the way. And you will get people thinking a little bit longer in their ordinary lives.”

From our respondents’ responses, we can see that the ecotourism operators in Sweden also perceive ecotourism as a strong sustainable industry because the majority associate ecotourism with environmental concern and then social, while economic is not the focus. They also realize the importance of sustaining the business. Therefore, we think that they have the same perception of ecotourism as we do.

5.2.2 Nature’s Best criteria

We have pointed out earlier that RJ seems to agree with Nature’s Best on explaining the concept of ecotourism and behavior guiding in ecotourism operation. Actually, all of our respondents think that Nature’s Best criteria are okay or good. LJ even claims that laws should exist in tourism industry in Sweden concerning ecotourism. Most of them do not think the criteria are difficult to achieve since they have been thinking and working the same way as its principles even before Nature’s Best was launched. Those respondents who think the criteria are difficult explain as following. SW doesn’t have any problem with the criteria but he says that the criteria are difficult and have to be like that since it is a high quality label. SA thinks that the criteria are not difficult in any specific part alone but it is difficult in a way that so many different criteria have to be taken care of at the same time. VV also expresses that it is difficult to comply with all the criteria since fulfilling all the requirement needs the support of the surrounding area to work together. She (VV) says that the main problem is that most of the ecotourism operators are small in size; they do not have enough human resources to accomplish every single criterion. This puts pressure on small operators. Smaller firms are acknowledged of lacking of resources and not being able to provide with human or financial resources (Lovelock, 1991; Ogders, 1998; in Morrison & Teixeira, 2004; Morrison, 1998; Storey, 1994). Therefore, the comments from VV, MC and RJ which consist of lacking of time and amount of employees (which often consists of only two among these respondents) are shedding light on the difficulties in being a small firm to comply with the criteria.

MC thinks that the whole ecotourism idea is fresh to him. He got in touch with Nature’s Best and found that it is a very good way in running business since he also wants to work in a more
environmental way. He thinks that the criteria are not very difficult and he receives education from working through the process. VV thinks that they do not have to adjust a lot in their way of running business for the label, but the importance of using environmental friendly and local products has been highlighted. They have kept improving to work better in every single detail in the criteria. FH said they haven’t changed much in the attitude and in the way of running business except that they purchased new environmental friendly snowmobile when it is newly available in the market. RJ said that the criteria help them to think through the operation process of the whole company. The rest of the respondents said they do not have to change anything for the Nature’s Best label.

The definition and principles of ecotourism stated by Nature’s Best are adopted from the most widely accepted in the world that stated by TIES (details can be referred to the theoretical chapter). We can see that most of the ecotourism operators who have been interviewed have had thoughts and acted in the same way of the heart of ecotourism before they have heard of the term ‘ecotourism’. VV said that they finally got to know how to call their way of thinking and running business. From the above responses, no wonder that tourism in Sweden has been perceived as ecotourism in general (Gössling and Hultman, 2006) because they have been operating the tourism business with the ecotourism thoughts long before they know the word “ecotourism”.

5.2.3 Nature’s Best usefulness

All of the respondents agree that Nature’s Best is useful and important. But they have quite different interpretation of the function of Nature’s Best. FH, SW and VV mention that they have received a lot of attentions from different media after getting the label. Nature’s Best also have a lot of follow-up actions and keep contacting them. SW said that it helps in marketing their company to the world, although he (SW) and NL also do not think it helps them in getting more customers. In contrast, VV believes that more and more customers will join their tours because of the label although it takes time. SA is also sure that it helps but he cannot see the impact yet since SA is still a new company. Beside the marketing effect, FH also mentions that a company needs some sort of certification to gain customer’s confidence in any industry. It is Nature’s Best in ecotourism industry as a certification for the customer to feel safe, confident and believe in the products. LJ suggest that this label is well developed and is especially useful for those tour operators who have not considered things about ecotourism. NL thinks that it is useful to show the surrounding people about how they run the business in a good way.

It is interesting to notice that even though they do not think Nature’s Best can bring higher business profit to them, they still think it is important and continue to pay for carrying the label every year. This indicates that ‘importance’ to the ecotourism operators does not necessarily associate with ‘profit’. Therefore, we think that they have a strong sustainable mind.

5.3 Ecotourism from three perspectives

By moving into the three perspectives, we are aiming to see how the respondents observed the three perspectives on ecotourism: social, environment and economy.

5.3.1 Environmental perspective

From a broader view looking at the natural environment, it is not a new topic for people to talk about how global warming is affecting the nature. We are not going to discuss deeply
about this issue. But from the ecotourism operator’s perspective, the change of weather or natural environment is directly affecting them and their business (Vanhove, 2005). FH, LJ and MC notice the climate and environmental change in the past ten years in the area they are working in. They all can see the winter is shorter and has less snow in the area than before. LJ claims that the forest has begun to overgrow because of the rise of temperature. He explains the reason that the area needs winter to “clean out the old”, i.e. water rises and freezes some vegetation and washes them away when it melts. The growth of vegetation is also noticed by FH. She says that in her area, the ski slope is covered by willows due to warmer weather nowadays while the slope was completely clear from willows years ago. She also mentions that there is no ground frost and ground has been clear from snow quicker. Since FH is holding horse riding tour which has to wait till the snow is gone, she says her tours can start two weeks earlier than ten years ago. What consequences which might have in the future, we can only speculate about, but the important finding is the acknowledgement that there is and has been a change which can be either beneficial or a drawback for the ecotourism operator. Beneficial in that sense it can extend the length of season and a drawback could be from not being able to use nature because of the overgrown forest.

SW sees the recent natural environmental change in their area by tourism activities. He finds that the mountains area has changed in terms of more snowmobiles and damages by skiers. He says that is due to more people visiting the mountains and considering that the Swedish government does not have any rules to limit the amount of people. He points out a potential risk to the natural environment that many foreign companies took advantages of the Swedish nature. They just come to use the area, compete with the use of local facilities and damage some area without contributing back to the local community and nature in Sweden, SW says. Regarding to the use of land in Sweden, we could refer to the public right of access discussed in the theoretical chapter. The right allows everyone to enjoy the freedom of using the nature (Sandell, 2006; SEPA, 2009). It could be the advantage for Sweden in developing ecotourism industry as tour operators would face less legal restrictions and procedures when they organize the nature-based tours. But at the same time, this right leads to a risk of the over using that natural areas. The positive outcomes from this public right requires the support from everyone by straightly conserving the natural environment.

When we came to the question on the impact of the respondent’s tours (Q.27), FH is the only respondent who points out that their tours have negative impacts on the environment, i.e. wearing down of nature by the leaving the riding paths. SW and VV who receive mainly international visitors admit after we asked specifically that the transport mode (by flight) for their customers is not environmental friendly. LJ thinks that by driving his car with a boat on the trailer, he would wear down the asphalt on the roads and cause air pollution. But he does not mention any negative impact on the nature by taking as many customers as he could manage into the forest. MC argues for the use of gasoline of motorbike for an adventure tour is weigh less than driving a car for commuting to work. As we have mentioned previously (chapter 4.3), it seems that the respondents in general do not think that they would have any negative impact on the environment (and the society). They could easily point out some possible damages to the nature causing by a third person. But when we asked them as the first person perspective, what they do to the nature, they tend to believe that they have not done anything “seriously” to destroy the nature. We are not trying to claim that the respondents have done something affecting the nature in a bad way. But we just want to point out that sometimes it is easier to see problems of other people than our own problems.
Ecotourism is supposed to be good to the natural environment. MC suggests that ecotourism helps to conserve the environment which contributes the nature and the wildlife. He mentions that “To get people educated and get people interested (about the nature) and actually get your business working on those foundations and values; then it really gains (benefits) the nature.” NL also agrees that the main environmental benefit from ecotourism is education. People learn more about the nature and are more interested in the nature-related works NL says. SA, SW and VV have the same opinion that ecotourism increases the public awareness of environmental conversation. On the other hand, SA has made a very interesting comment on the tourism impacts on environment in Sweden. He mentions that since the total number of tourists in Sweden is small, mass tourism and ecotourism in Sweden do not have a huge different in the level of impact to the natural environment. Being in ecotourism and paying to the SES is sponsoring the environmental projects but the contribution to the environment is still not very obvious. Although we understand the rationale behind his comment, we do not totally agree with what he has said. To regard the number of tourists in Sweden as high or low, that depends on which countries are being compared with, for instance Sweden has the largest share of foreign tourism among the Nordic countries since 2004 (see chapter 1.1.1). Among the developed countries in the world, Sweden is one of the most sparsely populated countries especially in the northern area. The well preservation of natural environment also depends on the level of environmental concerns of the public. By looking at the first principle of ecotourism, minimize impact, suggested by TIES (2009) and Nature’s Best (2009), not destroying the nature is already very good to the natural environment. The negative impact on the nature from tourism activities in Sweden is not as apparent as or as bad as those in other countries. In general, resources are usually used to solve some existing problems prior to prevent some other hidden problems from occurring. What SA has pointed out also helps to explain why not too many researches have been done to study ecotourism in Sweden so far. Problems facing in Swedish ecotourism are less urgent to solve than those negative impacts of ecotourism occurring in some other countries.

Following the discussion on the environmental concern in ecotourism, we found that five respondents (FH, NL, SA, SW and VV) mention that ecotourism should be in small scale right from the beginning when they explained what ecotourism is. An appropriate group size of tours is one of the aspects ecotourism operators have to consider according to the first principle of Nature’s Best: “Respect the limitations of the destination – minimize the negative impacts on local nature and culture” (Nature’s Best, 2009; Appendix 1). FH and VV also mention about the ecotourist should be aware of where they travel to and choose a more environmental friendly mean of transportation. NL emphasizes that the knowledge about the nature is very important. Here we can see the environmental perspective in ecotourism can be from different level and direction. From as broad as the macro environmental issue to the behavior of a single person who involves in ecotourism, ecotourism operators could have a lot of things to manage regarding to the environment. This is because they are closely working with the nature. Not only do ecotourism operators have a lot of things to manage, but they can in fact make a difference and impact on the whole industry by its work and business (Medina-Muñoz & Medina-Muñoz, 2000). This will continue to be discussed and analyzed in the management part of this chapter.

5.3.2 Social perspective
Around the local area, FH, RJ and VV see a decline in number of inhabitants comparing to ten years ago. FH says that although the population is slowly rising again since recent more young people are moving back for the nice environment, they are facing problem of lacking of job in the area. VV is surprised to notice that despite that less people are running the
society nowadays, they have better communication with each other. She gives an example of better support and more frequent of buses and trains connections although this is completely different for RJ who faces lack in communication in the local community with specifically the bus company. On the other hand, the number of inhabitants in Gotland, where MC is located, has kept rather stable according to MC; and LJ says that there are more people in the area nowadays. They both say that the local areas have been developing constantly in which better infrastructure, more buildings and houses can be seen. MC thinks that people want to have higher living standard. This opinion matches the guess by SA regarding to the reason of less kayaking companies around the area comparing to five years ago. SA mentions that camping is less popular than before which could be due to people are seeking for comfort. A consequence that has lead to his tour with indoor accommodation has increased in demand.

The above empirics indicate that ecotourism operators located in different part of Sweden are facing quite different social contexts. In general, people are moving away from small villages to bigger cities. The residents in different location are expecting different kind of life style. Note that LJ, MC and SA who are experiencing more similar social changes are all from the southern part of Sweden. We can see from their comments that people are happy to see the local area to become more advanced which brings comfort to their lives. In contrast, ecotourism operators who are located in the northern part of Sweden have not given similar remarks as those in the south; they focus more on basic living; better support and communication among the society. Although their aims and expectations on the social perspective are different, they are all striving for better local economy.

Coming to the relationship between society and tourism, most of the respondents think that tourism has a positive impact on the local communities. MC, NL, RJ, SA and VV mention about tourism bringing local economic benefits, such as business opportunities, job employment and income to the societies. NL and RJ notice an increase of number of small tour operators around the areas. RJ thinks that more work opportunity bringing from tourism helps the society to retain people living in the area since people moved away because of lacking of jobs. MC says that all local people are happy with more visitors going there. But he also mentions that there are too many tourists going in the summer that he wishes visitors can be spread all over the year. VV says that the local residents do not find tourists disturbing but they do not care too much about the visitors either, although the local government wants to encourage tourism development there. SW points out that there are Sami residents staying up on the mountain where his tours may pass by and also is belonged to a protected area. Sami inhabitants are protected from the disturbance of tourism that they have the right to constrict the entrance permission into that area if they find the tours are disturbing them. Therefore, SW is aware of the importance of minimize the negative impact on the local community. But at the same time, SW also expresses that some Swedish residents in that area do not wish to have Sami people herding reindeer up in the mountain; and some local people do not want to have the dog sledding tours around the area. He thinks that there are a lot of different interests from different people even within the same local society. The same opinion is also pointed out by VV that the forestry industry in the area also wants to maintain their business and protects their interests from the pressure of ecotourism development.

Ecotourism operators should support the local economic development by buying local products and hiring local employees which is one of the operating guideline from the Nature’s Best (SES et al, 2002). All respondents say, except NL that has not mentioned, that they purchase products from the local supplier as much as they can for their own and business consumption even though the local products could be more expensive most of the time. SW
thinks that they are using the resources in the local area and so all the benefits gained from ecotourism should also remain in the local area. He as well as VV also claim that the local societies are very proud of having their companies in the area because of the “ecotourism” way of running their business which means they concerns about social and environment. VV hires around 18 seasonal employees every year. They could come from the local area, other parts of Sweden, as well as from foreign countries, e.g. Germany. She claims that she would have hired all employees from the local area if there are enough suitable workers there. However, VV explains that they require more professional instructors with high language proficiency so as to maintain the quality of the tours which have mainly international visitors. Therefore, she cannot hire all seasonal workers locally. For the rest of the respondents, they hire non-permanent employees mainly from the local area if any.

From the responses of the interviewees, we find that they are all very aware of the local economic improvement bringing from tourism, especially in ecotourism. They as small scale tour operators help some other small business to survive in the local area. The existence of ecotourism operators in the area attracts non-residents to visit and spend money not only for the tours but also for the food and any other products and services the visitors would consume there. The whole society should be benefited from ecotourism if the operators and other parties in the local region are supporting each other, which is according to the principles of ecotourism (Nature’s Best, 2009; Appendix 1).

5.3.3 Economic perspective
The global economy is affecting the respondent’s business economy. FH and SW suggest that the origins of the incoming visitors depend very much on the currency rate. For instance SW suggests that when US dollar is strong against Swedish Krona, there will be more visitors from USA; when Euro is strong, more visitors would come from Euro-using countries. FH, focusing on domestic visitors, mentions that during this downturn of Swedish economy, riding in the mountain in Sweden could be a second choice of Swedes whose first choice is travelling to Thailand. FH actually claims that the downturn of Swedish economy leads to economic benefit to their company since it is cheaper to travel within Sweden comparing to travelling to other countries. For those who want to go for a vacation are more likely to consider for domestic travel and their second choice. Both FH and SW say they have very good booking for the last season and the coming season despite the financial crisis occurrence. This is not a surprising result that currency exchange rate affects the import and export business. For example, weak Swedish Krona encourages inflow exchange (foreign money) through exporting business (tourism services within Sweden) (Gilmore et al, 2007).

When we asked them about the main benefits gained from ecotourism (Q.14), MC thinks that he gets more customers through the ecotourism network. He got to start the business with the support through his own networking. Ecotourism is something new to him. Therefore, he would think that it helps him to expand his network. LJ, RJ, SA and VV say that the benefit would be marketing effect. Since they have got the ecotourism quality label from Nature’s Best which has been promoting ecotourism within and even outside Sweden. Their website has listed out all the approved ecotourism operators in Sweden with the description of labeled tours and some basic company information. RJ says that many people have used that website to search for the eco-tours. Nature’s Best has also pasted the operators’ homepage where the potential customers can find more information in. It serves as a gateway for everyone who is interested in knowing more about ecotourism or joining eco-tours in Sweden. Being one of the first ecotourism certificates in the world, Nature’s Best attracts different media to pay a lot of attention on the tour operators who have got this label. This has been mentioned earlier
when we talked about Nature’s Best usefulness (chapter 5.2.3). The point here is that some ecotourism operators associate ecotourism with Nature’s Best naturally when we were talking about ecotourism alone. This indicates that from ecotourism operator’s point of view, they agree with Nature’s Best on what and how ecotourism should be. Their economic benefit gained from ecotourism has been interpreted as economic benefit gained from being an approved ecotourism operator. Therefore, they think that the marketing effect is the main economic benefit which could be received.

FH and SW mention that the most important economic benefit gained from ecotourism is that they can set a higher price for their labeled tours (Q.14). They refer to being approved by Nature’s Best when answering the same question. They explain that being labeled implies what they are organizing is in high quality and therefore worth more. According to them, organizing high quality eco-tours incurs higher costs from buying local products and holding tours in small scale; and hence requires a higher price. SW specially mentions that as an approved ecotourism operator, they can get the permission to organize tours inside the national park easier.

Not too many of the respondents think that ecotourism brings significant profit to them. Discussing further with them, it seems like their business revenue target is not much exceeding the balance of all the expenses for business and their living (Q.24). Almost all of them started their business for living in the area as we have discussed in the business purpose (chapter 5.1.2). All respondents have a budget or target for their business every year except for FH and RJ who have everything in mind but not in paper regarding how much they should earn for living and how much they should purchase for consumption. To SW and VV, having fully booked of the tours in a season is their business target. They do not want to organize more tours within the same period of time, but instead, they want to extend their business season (VV) or organize a new tour in different season (SW). Referring back to our discussion on their business purpose again, most of them are not concerning very much about growing their ecotourism business.

### 5.4 Ecotourism operator dilemma

The majority of the respondents think that the perspectives are connected to each other, and it is hard to distinguish the most important perspective. For example, LJ states: “In order to start a fire, you need heat, wood and oxygen.” Therefore, the perspectives are dependent on each other which is also supported by FH, MC, NL, VV and RJ. This is inevitable since the perspectives in many aspects touch upon each other. Since the respondents feel that the perspectives are connected, we asked if the perspectives could also have conflicts (Q18). All of the respondents acknowledge that the perspective could collide in some way. The following part is concerned with presenting the findings and analyzing the results in terms of what dilemmas and conflicts were found both by respondents and from our findings during the interviews.

#### 5.4.1 Environmental/Economic dilemma

##### 5.4.1.1 Surviving in the ecotourism business

We have earlier mentioned that it is tough to survive in the ecotourism business, which can be seen by respondents having other tours or jobs to be able to work with the ecotourism business. In this case, the dilemma is arising when ecotourism operators have to deal with other tours which are not labeled in order to maintain their company. LJ has the motorcycle tours across Europe many weeks a year. He mentions that if he could not have motorcycle...
tours he would not be able to work with ecotourism. In some sense this might be viewed as weakening the sustainability. This is thinking on the environment and local community (ecotourism) on one hand to some degree, but on the other hand operating in another way (having motorcycle tours) which could be contradicting with the idea of ecotourism. The two factors are in some sense contradicting each other and causing problems to nature in terms of increase of pollution and greenhouse effect. For SW, he claims that the government enlarging the national park area is bad for the small operating company since it is difficult to get a permission to organize tour inside the park. Therefore, these can also be seen as a dilemma between economy and environment.

FH has a dilemma which is the usage of paths in the mountains. FH needs to take the same paths in the forest because of reindeers that can cause bigger damage if they can notice a path someone has taken. Therefore, FH faces a dilemma in taking the same path which means a more significant destruction and wear down on the nature. FH continues with saying that, if they cannot use the distinct paths the destruction will become bigger and more extent. At the same time, FH needs to earn money if they intend to have this business. This is a dilemma since it is a question on what is more important: the nature or the economy.

The plans on developing tours year round, which some of the ecotourism operators want to do, could cause conflicts. By using the nature around the destination for a longer period which increases of amount of tours, may cause impact on the wellbeing of the natural environment. In short term, this may not be noticeable for the people in the area for many years and can become an economic benefit for the company in terms of increasing business growth (Budeanu, 2005). This will eventually lead to, in the long run, a negative impact that affects the tourism business as well as the wellbeing of the entire community (Budeanu, 2005). Considering this, we can only speculate on this, but the continuously wearing down might in the end concludes to a downturn in the business as well.

Some of the respondents mention that investing in nature and environment costs. For example, LJ says that he has chosen to invest in more environmentally friendly fuel for his boats he is driving during the tour. The price of the fuel is almost double the price of the non-environmental friendly fuel, which is for him a way of investing and preserving the nature. The dilemma is though that the high price of the environmentally friendly fuel cause financial problems for the tour operator. This could be faced by the acknowledgement that small firms often lack in financial resources (Lovelock, 1991; Ogders, 1998 in Morrison & Teixeira, 2004; Morrison, 1998; Storey, 1994).

Concerning the hunting company, NL, they are facing something specific for their touring business. The hunting industry in Sweden is concerned with the number of animals that can be shot by season according to Svenska Jägareföreningen, the Swedish Association for Hunting and Wildlife Management (2009). NL mentions that if a company only concerns about the economic benefits and ignores the limit of animals shot, it can cause major problems to the nature and wildlife. By not following the rules on limiting, the hunting business can vanish because of lack of animals to hunt (Budeanu, 2005). This could also become a dilemma and the risk of animals being eliminated by too aggressive hunt.

5.4.1.2 Scale of tours
From the company’s economic perspective, increasing the maximum number of customers is a way to increase profit. On the other hand, from the environmental perspective, tourism activities could destroy the nature or disturb the wildlife (Leung et al, 2009). In order to
minimize the negative impacts on the natural environment which could be caused by too many visitors, it is necessary to set an appropriate limit on the number of tourists to control the access to the nature in a period of time. (Honey, 1999; SES et al, 2002; Nature’s Best, 2009) As mentioned before, size of tours is one of the aspects which have to be considered by the ecotourism operators. Almost all of the respondents have set a limitation on the number of customers in each tour and the total number of tours in a season. LJ and SA do not fix a number on them. Because of the background of military experience, LJ believes himself can handle tours with large number of customers and can monitor their behavior. For SA, since this is still a new company and in a developing process, he does not think that his tours would reach the carrying capacity in the natural environment. However, including those who have set the upper limits, all the respondents decide on the maximum number according to their own judgment on the resources capacity. For instance, FH set the customer number based on the space inside a Sami tent (accommodation); NL set the tour (hunting) capacity by considering the number of animals which could be shot according to his own knowledge in hunting field. Here, we are not trying to criticize our respondents’ judgment on the scale. Instead, we want to point out that the ecotourism operators are responsible to decide on the scale of tours for their own tours. The appropriate balance of profit and environmental concern is depending on operator’s own judgment. The problem is the negative impacts might not be observed instantly and might become very difficult to recover by the time when someone noticed it. This could become a big dilemma between the economic and environmental concerns for a company especially when it is facing its economic downturn.

5.4.1.3 International vs. domestic visitors
Regarding to the customers of the respondents, except for SW and VV who have majority of international customers, all the others have mainly Swedish customers. Considering transportation is one of the main sources of pollution in the world, travelling long distance by flights, private cars, etc. are not encouraged from the environmental point of view (Gössling & Hall, 2008). SW and VV also acknowledge that if their international customers travelling all the way by flight to join their tours, this is contradicting with the environmental concerns although they do not point out this negative impact by themselves when we asked the respective question (Q.27). SW mentions that they have been criticized by some committees within Nature’s Best that if SW should be regarded as working in ecotourism because they take international visitors. But both of them also express that their business would not be able to sustain relying on domestic customers only since they offer very high quality tours with a relatively higher price. Both SW and VV also face difficulty in lowering the price to attract only domestic visitors for the environment as they would not be able to make a living on the price if they keep the same quality of the tours. They do not see lowering the quality of the tours is an option.

It is worth to note that the level of effects on environment by means of transport should not be solely judged by the country of origin of the visitor especially in Swedish context. For instance, international visitors from Denmark can travel to Malmö much quicker and easier then domestic visitors going from Kiruna. Besides, visitors depart from the same place could also choose different means of transportation, such as taking domestic flight or taking local train; driving a car or taking a bus. Since three quarters of the domestic leisure visitors choose to travel by car according to Nutek (2008), the domestic tourism can also have big negative impacts on environment. Therefore, we can see a conflict between environmental concern regarding to the travelling means and economic benefits for companies by attracting more international visitors, as well as domestic visitors coming from all over Sweden if people do not think for the better way of travel.
FH do mention about the choice of transport can be conflicting with environmental concern. She claims that she is not interested in having big investment to attract international customers. She thinks that traveling with long distance train might take longer time but the customer can choose to take a night train so that they would feel the trip goes faster. FH is also imagining if an airport would be closer to them, the tour operator and the tourists could be benefited from as time is money. The trip to the destination would be moving a lot faster, and at the same mean economic benefits in terms of more potential visitors that can reach them. The downside would be the negative impact of the usage of airplane for transporting the visitors to the destination which causes air pollution, and the potential increase in tourists.

5.4.2 Economic/Social dilemma

5.4.2.1 Cost vs. price
From the previous discussion on economic and social perspectives regarding to the cost of local products and price setting on tours, it is not hard to see a dilemma between them. For the sake of local society, ecotourism operators should purchase as much local products as they can (SES et al, 2002). However, agreed with the opinions from the respondents, there are cases that local products are usually produced in small scale and hence more expensive than those goods coming from mass production in other foreign countries. Higher cost implies that ecotourism operators should, by the most common ways, either bear the cost by themselves or increase their tour price to cover the cost. FH mentions that they are facing the pressure from this dilemma. Since their customer base is mainly from Sweden, the price cannot be set too high or otherwise they would lose customers and eventually could not be able to survive on this business. LJ also has the same difficulty that as the company is located in south of Sweden where population and competition are very high (comparing to the north of Sweden), he has to maintain a competitive price in order to continue his business. This is an obvious dilemma in between economic and social concerns which could be faced by ecotourism operators.

5.4.2.2 Use of land
The right for public access to the countryside is letting any person in Sweden feel free to use the land in different ways (Sandell, 2006). SW mentions that foreign companies come to Sweden and use the land, destruct and leave garbage behind in the mountains. LJ also mentions this, and especially the German people, who are concerned with visiting Sweden and being their own guide in the Swedish mountains. VV mentions that some land owners have problems with people using their land. MC adds that there is a minor part of the inhabitants on the island of Gotland who are displeased with the tourists being on their land. This regulation causes conflicts between the inhabitants of the community and ecotourism operators. UN (1999c) has acknowledged the problem of exploiting land and vulnerable persons. Then, who has the right to use the land? In Sweden, everyone can stay on a private land for a short visit (Sandell, 2006; SEPA, 2009), but on the other hand the inhabitants or land owners could get angry and upset for the others “using their land”.

Another dilemma which can be faced is also concerned with the inhabitants of the local community and the ecotourism operator. SW mentions that they are working in order to avoid their tours to be stopped by the Sami people. The permission of entering national park can be taken away if Sami people think the tour activities disturb their lives. This can be seen as an economic disadvantage since the way of running the business becomes more complicated, while on the other hand the conservation of the Sami people’s culture and lives are valuable
and important to consider. This is becoming another apparent conflict in the lives of ecotourism operators.

5.4.3 Social/Environmental dilemma

5.4.3.1 Wildlife vs. society
What might be good for the wildlife does not necessarily mean is good for the society. VV has acknowledged a long conflict in the area consisting of wolves appearing in the neighborhood and attacking elk and people’s dogs that many local people are against this kind of wild animals. For the sake of society, the wolves should disappear from the area. But this is contradicting with the thoughts of conserving the natural environment and wildlife. This conflict is not new in Sweden, but it is controlled by the society in terms of how many wild animals can be hunted.

5.4.3.2 Nature reserves vs. local community
MC observes that too many nature reserves can block people out and cause a decline of number of people visiting the nature. In order to preserve the land and nature, nature reserves can be one way. MC says that Gotland has over 100 nature reserves and many thousands of medieval treasures to preserve. The restrictions of behavior inside protected areas, such as national park and nature reserves, could be very different from the right of public access which applies to the non-protected areas (SEPA, 2009). MC’s comments imply that the accessibility to the nature of the local people decrease with expanding the protected areas which is supposed to be good to the natural environment. Though, MC says that the reserves are blocking out people which is not good for the local community. Therefore, the dilemma here is between the nature reserves and the social concern.

5.4.3.3 Nature conservation vs. forestry and mining industry
The concern of local society can violate the environmental conservation. VV mentions that they are located in the area with the presence of a community depending on forestry industry. This is not a new industry around the area. Trees have been cutting down continuously. VV has the stand on the environmental conserving perspective and has been trying to talk to the forestry industry with the cooperation of the local government. She does not state clearly what the discussion content was, but the presence of conflict between VV and the forestry company is clear. She says that always different people have different interests and the side with higher power and more money would win. The local government supports the development of tourism including ecotourism in the area. Ecotourism has been put into the long term development strategy of the society that helps her in the discussion with the forestry community.

Similar situation happened in the area where NL is located. The mining company had been operated and shut down and started again. He claims that he had a lot of conflicts with the mining field (he does not mention what were the problems) which has already been closed again due to their unethical way of running the business. The mining case has not been discussed in details during the interview. He brings that up as an example for a company choosing economic benefits over the environmental concern. But here, we are not trying to study the sustainability of other industries. Instead, the focus is that in those forestry or mining industry based societies, local economic is usually highly depending on that industry. The conflicts between the environmental concern from the ecotourism operators and the two other industries can also be seen as the dilemma between environmental concern (nature conservation) and social concern (local economy).
5.5 Managing and balancing dilemmas in ecotourism

In order to achieve sustainability, the three perspectives (social, environment and economy) are needed to be balanced (WCED, 1987). Then how is this done by the ecotourism operators? The following parts are concerned with managing the identified dilemmas that exist in the industry from the findings from the respondents.

5.5.1 Professional in the area

Ecotourism operators have to be professional in what they are offering and have to be very knowledgeable about the specific conditions around the area. The ecotourism operator is the one with more knowledge and understanding of the surrounding and society compared to a visitor. At least it is a demand of the Nature’s Best, where the six principles are checking if the operators work in the specific areas. (SES et al, 2002; Nature’s Best, 2009) By interviewing eight different ecotourism operators, the answers vary which could depend on the situation and geographical placement.

RJ and MC are both concerned about the paths and where in the nature to move around. One of the criteria which is to take new ways in the nature and do not use the same paths which consequences are making a clear and distinct path in natural environment (SES et al, 2002; Nature’s Best, 2009). RJ is riding in the mountains and is constantly trying new roads, which MC also does with the mountain bikes on Gotland. On the other hand, FH is not using different paths and instead creating a distinct path since the problem of a high amount of reindeers following paths and tracks. This is contradicting the criteria of Nature’s Best, but since the ecotourism operator knows the area better than the committee of Nature’s Best, the company is acting in a professional way in the area.

There are other ways for being professional in the area. NL mentions that it is important to have good knowledge of the nature and the number of animal population. NL also thinks it is important to think through everything on beforehand about the tour arrangement. Being a professional, the ecotourism operator should know the local area and be able to connect with the visitors, says FH. LJ states that the ecotourism operators have to know their ability to take care of people and to know what they are actually doing. MC is concerned with taking care of visitors and making them feel secure when spending time with MC. These are examples on what the ecotourism operators think are needed when arranging an eco-tour (Q. 26) Therefore, the ecotourism operators have to be able to take care of the customers; understand the carrying capacity of the nature and local region; and have knowledge about the surrounding. Their professional knowledge and practice are the key factor determining the strength of sustainability of ecotourism operating business.

5.5.2 Limiting tourists

One way of minimizing the negative impact on the environment is limiting the amount of tourists (Honey, 1999; SES et al, 2002; Nature’s Best, 2009). Limiting the groups of tourists is a common thing among some of the operators. FH limits their groups of maximum 12 people; MC has normally 10 people in his exclusive tours; NL is concerned with limiting the group of tourists depending on the population of wildlife animals; SW has concerned with six people in one group; and finally RJ mentions that they also limit their numbers to 12 tourists in one group. The other two respondents, LJ and SA, do not limit their group size. SA mentions that they do not think they have reached the maximum amount of people, but today’s tours have maximum 9 people. If SA would have more tourists, then it would not be a problem since the solution could be separated into different tours, different days or to different destinations. LJ can alone take care of 46 visitors in a group at the same time but he
can also solve the problem of having larger number of tourists by hiring extra helper and split the customers into two groups.

We observe that the reasons for limiting are related to the ability to take care of their customers, while still being able to provide with a high quality within the tour, as MC says. SW mentions that they tried to double the group size of tours but did not work out since the quality of tours and food decreased. FH states that they limit the amount of people because of the space inside Sami tent and also the ability they can take care of the customers. LJ can handle many people at the same time due to his military background. Though, he clearly states that the group size is not determined on the environmental concerns. NL says that the amount of tourists is depended on the judgment of other professionals to decide on how many animals can be hunted. As observed, the reasons differ from each the operator, but in the case for SW and MC, the concept of maintaining high quality in tours and food are important. Therefore, the size of the groups is preferably having a high standard which means fewer customers. The four respondents do not mention the reason for limiting the tourists as for minimizing the impact on nature (SES et al, 2002; Nature’s Best, 2009). Only NL is concerned about the amount of people that can participate in the tour in relation to the amount of animals to hunt.

5.5.3 Communicating

Communication is another tool of the ecotourism operators in order to handle dilemmas. One indication which is promoting the communication to customers while being on tours is that the guide is following the tourists throughout the tour. Gilmore et al (2008) claims that the on-site communication is the most important information the tourist needs. The ecotourism operators MC, NL, SA and SW are with the tourists the whole tour which state that the guide can communicate and inform the customers about the area, history, giving limitations on what the customer can do, etc. Also, this make the fact that the guide can control that the tourists are not behaving in a negative way for the environment and so on. LJ says that the wish of the customer is in his first priority, since he wants to listen to the customer’s request and try his best to satisfy their wants. VV is not following the customer throughout the tour, and instead is informing on where the customers can go and other suggestions on what to view during the tour. VV is also demanding the customers to sign a contract before the trip which is concerned with that the tourist is taking care of the nature. If the tourists are behaving in displeasing way, the information will be reached to VV by residents living in the area. It will become easier to communicate and control the behavior of the customer when participating throughout the tour and at the same time important information will be covered when the guide is joining the tour. Despite that, LJ points out the fact that the wish of the customer is number one, and what the customer wants to do will in the end affect the outcome of the quality of the tours.

Another way of communicating is getting feedback from the visitor in terms of what was good and what could have been done better. All of the respondents have some sort of feedback collected from the customers. FH is viewing feedback as very important and is involved in a survey which is carried out by Västerbotten’s Tourist Agency. This survey is consisting of information about the opinions of the customer, and information such as gender, geographical origin, age, how the guest got information about the operator, will the customer return, how much money they spent and will the customer spread the information about the tours to others. Therefore, FH has information and statistics about who their customers are. NL, SA and VV are also having surveys for the customer to answer. SW and LJ are mentioning that good feedback for them is when the customer is returning back and having
more tours with them. Guest books are also used to get feedback which is used by RJ and SW. MC is mentioning that he is collecting feedback but is not very good in using the comments, although the aim of the tours is that the customers do not have anything to complain about and feel satisfied with the tours, MC says. The ways of collecting feedback are different, but all of the respondents are interested in feedback which in advance becomes an advantage for the ecotourism operator of evaluating and improving the tours.

Communication is a way to handle and solving problems. For those operators that are working in areas which need extra care of the society and the culture groups, communication is a must. FH, RJ and SW are both working in areas which have inhabitants of Sami origin. Ecotourism is about to create awareness and have respect for the local culture in the area (UN, 1999c; Honey, 1999; SES et al, 2002). The three respondents both live and work in the area where Sami people live, which is indicating that a certain way of communicating with Sami people is important and also to inform about the culture of Sami to visitors. SW is mentioning the fact that they respect the lives of Sami, since they are avoiding disturbing their lives and work. SW acknowledges a conflict between the local people and Sami which is based on the lack of communication. FH shows good examples on how to communicate with their local Sami village. Words as cooperation, respect and membership are used by FH. For example, FH says that they know when the Sami people are herding their reindeers and when certain events in the Sami lives is taking place, by which FH is avoiding by not disturbing with passing through with the tours. RJ doesn’t mention the relation with Sami people, but instead that the customers are interested in the Sami culture which they inform them about. The respondents agree on the communication skills are important when having a relation and creating respect and awareness of the local culture.

VV adds additional information on communication with the society. The problem in their area is the cutting trees and vanishes of forest. Communication and cooperation is one way of trying to solve the conflict with the forestry company and community. Local government is involving ecotourism as one of its long term strategies; it is becoming easier for VV to talk to the forestry company since VV has support of the local government. LJ is also involved in communicating with the society and local government. By being involved, he is making sure that the awareness of ecotourism is of interest and that the authorities are monitoring the area for what is going on there. The aim of local community to become an eco-municipality is helping LJ in his work of promoting ecotourism. NL is thinking the same about the communication with the society. NL is communicating with the society closely, and that the community will know what they as an ecotourism operator do. If the communication would not work, it could create problems in different perceptions about the use of natural area since they all share the natural resource, NL states. By communicating with the society and local government, the outcome of doing ones business can become easier which is stated by the three respondents as well as SW and FH.

5.5.4 Educating

In order to create awareness and respect for the local community and preserve and conserve the nature life (UNWTO, 2006; Eurostat et al, 2001, in Vanhove, 2005; TIES, 2009; Honey, 1999; SES et al, 2002), educating customers and visitors is one way to pursue knowledge (SES et al, 2002). The ecotourism operators are supposed to inform their visitors about the local community and nature which is surrounding the destination (SES et al, 2002). Therefore, how the operators are educating their visitors may be diverse. The depth of knowledge of customers about nature, wildlife and local community varies, according to SW, VV and RJ. Some are educated and some are not, though FH experiences that the latest six months the
customers have become more and more conscious and aware on being environmental concerned. For NL, the perception is that the customers usually have a very good knowledge about hunting and environmental concerns, this is also supported by SA. LJ says that the customers are at least interested and curious which is the most important factor since then he can teach them and learn them about what they are interested in.

The ecotourism operators do educate their customers, but differently. MC is educating and getting the visitors interested by talking about Nature’s Best and if he has the time he informs the visitors about the lifestyle on the island and the nature. FH is sending out a brochure to the customer before they visit the destination, which they also discuss the matter throughout the tour. VV sends also information to the customers which is information about ecotourism, Swedish Public Right of Access and other useful information when they booked their tours. VV is also informing and educating the visitors when having arrived to the destination about how to behave and what to see in the area. NL also sends out information about the nature, the animals, the destination and culture with further references to the customers before the tours, and throughout the tour the customers are also involved in gaining knowledge. SA would also send out information to the customer in explaining ecotourism. SW is talking and educating his customers throughout the whole tour. RJ did not mention by what means and when they educate their customers, but she has said that they educate visitors in terms of horses, history around the area, Sami culture/history and nature in the area. Therefore, for ecotourism operators, educating the customers and give information about the area is a common practice and one way to create awareness of the environment issue and respect of local community.

5.5.5 Raising the price (or not?)

The dilemma of buying local made food and environmentally friendly products may collide with implications of higher costs. The statement of LJ is confessing that ecotourism is not a gold mine and expensive to be involved in. SW also state that there are higher costs involved in the business. Therefore, the higher costs implicate also a high quality since the ecotourism operators do invest in supporting the local community by buying local products, and also help conserving the nature. LJ states that the high quality come from being an tour operator working in ecotourism which gives the customers a feeling of security since the operating business is not cheating or on the black market, but instead is reaching the requirements of the Nature’s Best criteria. MC and SW are both mentioning high quality in their eco-tours which consists of good guiding, local food and a sense of security of the customers. Therefore, the ecotourism operators raise their price, or do they really?

FH mentions that they could have 20% higher price, which they should have, but the main problem would be attracting the Swedish tourists to join the tours. Though, they haven’t raised the price 20% but instead view themselves as a bit more expensive than tour operating business. This would be balanced with the fewer customers on the other hand. SW acknowledges that they are the most expensive ecotourism operator in Sweden. LJ states that he was told by the Swedish Ecotourism Society to have a higher price on the tours, but since the competitive environment in the area is high he cannot raise the price of the risk of not having any customers. RJ says that from working sustainably in the long run, the ecotourism operator can take a higher price for the product and the customer will get more. Though, RJ does not say if they had higher price or not. VV argues for having expensive tours due to the reason of limiting the amount of visitors. She thinks that the key practice to support the higher price of the eco-tour is to get the customers understood the value of the products behind the price although this is also the difficult part. NL has set a high price due to the limited length of season, which has lead to decreasing number of visitors in the recent years. The pricing is
still a dilemma for the ecotourism operators since some of them are facing uncertainty in the demand and percentage of booking tours.

Four out of the respondents (FH, SW, VV and RJ) are not doing budgeting in terms of accounting on how much they need to earn for living. Instead the business target of SW and VV is to have the tours fully booked. FH and RJ have a feeling on how much they need to have in income and know it within them. The rest of the respondents are making a budget for the next coming year, but which some have a hard time to follow the budget, and LJ states that he usually makes more marketing than he planned to do. Therefore, it seems as the pricing is hard for them to calculate on how much the customer is willing to pay since some of them do not follow their budget or even make a budget. Butler (1999) says that the limited practical use of management, planning and monitoring systems may have different impact on how to cope with sustainability. From what we perceive is that the increase of using planning, budgeting and monitor the business some keywords to help solve the dilemma of pricing.

5.5.6 Getting attention and doing marketing

An outcome of being labeled by Nature’s Best is the increasing attention and marketing, which RJ, SA, SW, VV, LJ and FH state that they could obtain. “You can never get too much of attention,” states FH. Marketing is an economic benefit and outcome of ecotourism, states SA, VV, LJ and RJ. Media has also been a factor for attention and increase of visitors, states FH. The benefits of marketing are that customers are using the website for looking for tours, where the ecotourism operator can easier be seen claims RJ. Since LJ is driving with environmentally friendly fuel in his boats, it is good for the environment and at the same time good for his marketing. SW believes ecotourism is good marketing for his company, but it does not mean he will get more customers. This on the other hand was achieved by getting attention from media, claimed FH, which increased the amount of visitors.

In terms of making own marketing, LJ is contributing to do marketing on the Scandinavian market. He also believes by driving his car with the boat on the trailer around the society is creating good marketing since he is contributing good advantages to the local community. According to Medina-Muñoz & Medina-Muñoz (2000), the significant sustainability outcome of the small firms in tourism is concerning the increasing of economic development in the region. According to LJ he is, by buying the local products, also helping the community to prosper, while he on the other hand leave marketing flyers at each store and service provider. Gilmore (et al, 2008) also stated that there is a difficulty in promoting a destination to a major target group. This LJ experiences since he claims that he is constantly doing more marketing than he budgeted for and by that the difficulty is in financing the marketing and reach the target group.

In order to reach the customers, FH has two agents abroad which are helping them to get attention from the specific countries. As mentioned before, LJ is marketing his business on the Scandinavian market by using specific travel magazines. Other ways of making marketing, could be word-of-mouth. MC is concerned with having customers that are pleased and who are spreading the word about their tours. MC is also concerned with having networks which would be an example on marketing since the attention is gained from having good contacts with other companies and key persons. LJ also stated that he had one customer that helped him making marketing, consisting of sending out postcards with the photo from the ecotourism operator’s destination, and helping promoting his tours to about 200 clients.
5.5.7 Cooperating

According to Medina-Muñoz & Medina-Muñoz (2000), cooperation is an outcome of the sociocultural contributions by the tour operator. This is connected in some sense to the social benefits of the ecotourism operators buying local food and products. LJ is cooperating with a few professional entrepreneurs that have high quality since otherwise he will not hire them. FH is, as we have mentioned before, cooperating with the local Sami village in terms of buying reindeer meat and respect the Sami people’s lives. Since many tourists are interested in the Sami culture, both the ecotourism operator and the Sami people can be benefited by cooperating with each other. This can solve the conflicts between economic and social concerns (chapter 5.4.2.2). FH also acknowledges that the companies and entrepreneurs in Ammarnäs cooperate and are trying to work together. VV is cooperating with the local government for a better discussion and communication with the forestry company, but also to enhance the attention and use of ecotourism in the long run. VV also thinks that cooperation is required in the area in a way of working in a proper way. MC cooperates with another company that is renting out mountain bikes which the customers can rent the bikes from. SA is cooperating with the society in terms of buying products from the area which has in some sense created businesses and job employment. This is also done by RJ, LJ, VV, SW, MC and FH. Therefore, part of doing well for the local community (SES et al, 2002; Nature’s Best, 2009) is by cooperating with the entrepreneurs and local government.
6. Conclusions

In this part we are presenting the main conclusions we have developed by collecting and analyzing information gained from interviewed respondents and past research. We also are presenting our recommendations to the ecotourism operators and additional suggestions on further research. The chapter ends with an evaluation of the credibility of thesis.

To sum up the thesis, we would like to first repeat our research question:

How do ecotourism operators manage dilemmas within the ecotourism industry in Sweden?

The purposes of the thesis are as following:

• To identify what dilemmas ecotourism operators face in Sweden
• To understand how dilemmas are managed
• To provide with our recommendations to the ecotourism operators

6.1 Main conclusions

Here we are going to draw the main conclusions of our findings from the previous chapters in order to answer our research question and fulfill the purposes of the thesis.

6.1.1 Identifying dilemmas

From our first part of the dilemmas, it is apparent that the ecotourism operator’s business does not survive only on labeled tours in ecotourism. They face the dilemma between economic and environmental concern mainly because of the feeling of threat of maintaining their livings. Their business target is not much higher than meeting their surviving needs, at least according to what they have mentioned. However, the importance of the business economy is different from each respondent. Some have higher concern on economy and say that ecotourism could not exist if one cannot gain economy to maintain the business. And they think that they have no choice but having other income sources which are not from ecotourism. Some have put environmental over the economic concern and say that if the nature has been destroy, they would not be able to have their business, and hence no economy. Going back to our observation, they all have business other than ecotourism at the moment. The dilemma is still there if they cannot support their livings by ecotourism activities only. However, if the business target of the company is easy to achieve, one would be able to put more concern on the environmental issue, the dilemma would also be less apparent. This can lead to a strong sustainable business.

The dilemma of having international or domestic customers is a dilemma for some respondents since the empirical findings shows that most of the ecotourism operators have mostly domestic customers, while two out of eight are depended on the international customers. They are more or less aware of the environmental impact caused by the transportation. The general perception is that international customers would have higher negative impacts on the natural environment. Dilemma appears here that the ecotourism operators need to keep a higher price for the ecotourism tour because of its higher cost. How low can the price decline to attract more domestic customers while sustaining their business? However, it does not mean that the domestic tourists must have less impact on the environment as we have discussed. Not too many controls have been done by the ecotourism
operators on the transportation modes of the tourists. Even if they are aware of the negative impacts which could be caused by the travels of the tourists, do they choose to stop receiving those tourists? Therefore, we acknowledge this as a dilemma between economic and environmental concern. This is a tough situation since their income is highly depending on the tourists. How picky could they be on receiving customers when their small scale business is targeting only a small number of customers and with the requirements of the principles of ecotourism?

The geographical situations are leading to differences on how the ecotourism operators view the social perspective and economy together. The clearest example is the division of north and south of Sweden. In the north, more areas are facing the decline of population which is one of the reasons of why the local community is depending on the ecotourism to create more jobs. The cooperation within the local society is more essential because the local residents rely on each other. The need of support of local community, such as buying local products, seems to be more apparent, in contrast with the places in the south of Sweden which is experiencing a stable or increasing number of inhabitants. The local societies there have more business opportunities and would then be less likely to depend on a single industry. The need of support of local communities is less significant. Since most of the respondents have mentioned that the higher price of the eco-tour mainly comes from the higher cost of purchasing local products, the dilemma between social and economic concerns seems to be more obvious in the less developed regions. This is because the need of local support adds pressure on the ecotourism operators. However, we also notice that the ecotourism operators in the south are actually in a highly competitive business environment. They also face the pressure to keep their products being competitive in price so as to sustain the business, even though they might want to fully support the local society. Therefore, although ecotourism operators from the north and the south of Sweden are under totally different social situations, both groups of operators also face the social and economic dilemma which comes from the pressure from different concerns. From what we have just discussed, we can see that the ecotourism operators from more developed cities have more difficult to achieve a stronger sustainable business due to the complexity of the business environment, and hence more economical concerns.

The overall dilemma is: which concern should come first? Economy in terms of earning money and surviving with having labeled tours; for the sake of the environment in order to preserve a long term wellbeing in nature; or the consideration of social and local community benefits? Regarding to dilemmas, we have discovered a few of the many dilemmas that may exist, in which these mentioned dilemmas are the most apparent and directly affecting the ecotourism operators we interviewed.

6.1.2 Managing dilemmas

In this part we are presenting the following ways for an ecotourism operator to manage the dilemmas we discovered from the interviews so as to answer our research question. The ecotourism operators use techniques as communication, education, cooperation, marketing, raise of price (or no raise), limitation of tourists and professionalism in the area.

The most common practice among the ecotourism operators is that the operator is communicating with customers and society. Communication can help ecotourism operators to talk to the inhabitants of the society in terms of what the ecotourism operator is working with so as to solve any misunderstanding in between them. The dilemma between ecotourism operator’s economy and the social concern might be able to reduce by finding a common
ground for both parties. Communication and education are tools for ecotourism operators taking care of their customers. The most common way is to provide information to the customer throughout the tour. Through appropriate communication and education, ecotourism operators could try to get their customers understand the concept of ecotourism, and hence the value of their eco-tours.

Ecotourism operators state that having tours that are labeled means that the tours have higher quality, and at the same time a higher price. Setting a higher price would also allow the ecotourism operator to limit the amount of visitors, which is the aim of minimizing the negative impact on environment. This is a way to solve the economic and environmental dilemma. Another problem is though whether the visitor is willing to pay a higher price or not. Ecotourism operators also exist in a competitive industry while ecotourism itself is a niche tourism market. Some of the respondents mention that they should set a higher price, but if they would raise the price, their company would not be working in a sustainable business. This requires also the previous solution of getting the customers to understand the higher value of the products behind the higher price.

Attention from different parties and media is what all of the ecotourism operators obtain since joining ecotourism and Nature’s Best. Some operators are actively making marketing to reach new customers and some other is networking. The common opinion is that the joint in Nature’s Best has helped marketing the business. Is ecotourism therefore seen as a marketing tool? This seems to be in some sense accurate among the ecotourism operators, in which seems to have a purpose of reaching the customers to travel more “ecotouristic”, and also for other tour operators to become more concerned in the ecotouristic way of thinking.

6.1.2.1 Our final remarks

As our final remark after the whole study, we think that economic concern is the origin of where the main dilemmas come from. Since ecotourism is supposed to be focusing on the conservation of natural environment and also the local society, economic concern should not be highlighted. Especially Nature’s Best, which is the main icon of ecotourism in Sweden, has taken away the use of financial terms in their ecotourism principles. We think this act helps to de-emphasize the importance of economic concern in ecotourism operation, and hence bring the aim higher up along the sustainability scale. If this is the spirit of ecotourism, how far are the Swedish ecotourism operators approaching this goal? Tour operators who want to depend on ecotourism as a surviving tool would face the pressure from trying to achieve this ideological goal. We are not saying that ecotourism concept is unachievable in practice. We just want to bring out our thoughts that ecotourism operators (as far as we could observe in the Swedish context) have been striving to pursue a strong sustainable business which involves the large concerns of environmental and social interests. Tour operators can also keep asking themselves, “Have we arrived the goal of ecotourism yet?”

Every one of us has been doing something with negative impacts on the world everyday. It is unreasonable and unfair to expect the ecotourism operators not to concern about their own economies but contributing to the environment and some other people only just because they are working with ecotourism. Therefore, we think that there is nothing to be blamed to include the economical concern in their operation. Though, they do not show a high consideration on economic aspect in general as how we perceive an ordinary company would have. Our last conclusion: Ecotourism in Sweden has strong sustainability.
6.1.3 Recommendations

Ecotourism operators are professional around their local area and in their services offering. They know clearly what would be the best to the surrounding. They should be more active in sharing their professional knowledge with the Nature’s Best committee as well as with the other tour operators. One of the respondents we interviewed also mentions that the ecotourism operators should have a meeting and discuss and share their difficulties and challenges. We recommend all parties who are working with ecotourism to keep closer contact with each other so as to share knowledge and learn from each other. Since ecotourism is still a new industry which needs a lot of input of knowledge of common and particular practices in different context in order to improve the whole industry.

All ecotourism operator respondents are positive to have the Nature’s Best label, but many of them say that they do not see or could not see the label has brought more customers to them. In order to enhance the usefulness of this quality label, which also helps themselves who have the labeled already, they could try to do some statistics on where the customers get to know the tours from. By doing so, they will see the effectiveness of Nature’s Best and the results can also share with Nature’s Best so as to improve its marketing channels. Ecotourism operators can also try to get their customers’ comments or opinions on ecotourism. Working together with the above recommendation, the aim is to achieve the stronger sustainability in ecotourism.

6.2 Suggestions on further research

Research has acknowledged the difficulties and dilemmas that can be brought out of the three perspectives on sustainable development. Ecotourism operators state that the perspectives are connected to each other and in some sense touch upon one another. Is there really a way of achieving sustainability? How do we know when we have reached the sustainable development in our business and community? By trying to manage the dilemmas the ecotourism operators face in ecotourism industry today, the aim is by finding ways of working accordingly requirements of ecotourism and Nature’s Best which in a sense is the most appropriate way of reaching sustainability in ecotourism. It is still a field to do more research on, which we are giving examples on later, and thoughts that will follow us throughout the lifetime of human beings.

We notice that the respondents do not call the visitors joining their tours as ‘customer’ but ‘guest’ although we always use ‘customer’ in our interview guide as well as while we asked questions during the interview. We think this is an interesting finding which may indicate that the ecotourism operators do not perceive their business as the kind of conventional business. It feels like they treat their customers as their guest to share the experience and have fun together. But we cannot say for sure if this is really the rationale behind or it is just a normal practice of how they name the customer group in ecotourism industry. We would have confirmed with them if we could notice it earlier. That is why we do not discuss this in the analysis but in this final remark. We therefore believe this could become an interesting topic to research more about.

Another suggestion on further research is a comparison of ecotourism operators and tour operators. Even though the ecotourism operators have labeled tours, some of the respondents mentioned that “normal” tour operators could also be working in this way but are not labeled. We therefore suggest that a research would be appropriate to do on how tour operators work in this field and about sustainable development. Maybe there are not many differences
between tourism and ecotourism in Sweden, which implies that tourism in Sweden could be
concerned as strong sustainable.

Apart from the above suggestions, we also think that it would be interesting to research on
ecotourism operators in Sweden from local community’s point of view. The reason is that
when we have interviews with the ecotourism operators for this study, most of them do not
think that they have any negative impacts on the environment and the local society; and some
of them claim that the local society appreciates how they run the business in the area. Since
our thesis is focusing on how the tour operators work in ecotourism and therefore we study
this topic from their point of view. In order to get a broader picture of the interaction within
the ecotourism industry, a further study can be held to incorporate the opinions from the local
community on the performance of ecotourism operators.

6.3 Credibility of findings

6.3.1 Reliability

As we have just discussed in the suggestion on further research about the findings got from
the interviews with ecotourism operators, we can see a critique on the reliability on the
findings. Due to the reason that we chose to study ecotourism in Sweden from ecotourism
tour operator’s perspective, we conduct interviews with the operators only. When they have
made any comments regarding to the interactions with the surrounding environment and local
community, we could not verify if what they have mentioned, is the same case as it would be
agreed from a local resident’s point of view. For instance, when a tour operator claimed that
the local society is happy to see a lot of tourists visiting the area, we could not know if the
local society is really thinking in the same way. Even if the respondents have expressed their
opinions based on what they believe in, we could still question on the reliability of their
answers because everyone could have different interpretations on someone else’s thoughts.
Therefore, we need to be aware of their answers represent their own thoughts and
interpretations only.

6.3.2 Validity

In terms of achieving proper validity, the information is needed to be enough for supporting
the results (Johansson Lindfors, 1993). Therefore, this means that the validity of our thesis is
measured adequately. We believe that we have reached a relatively enough amount of
respondents to interview. This because the information gained from the heterogeneous
respondents was in some cases similar and in other cases different and therefore unique.
Though, we are aware that many more interviews would help support the findings, we do
have to consider the limitations on the thesis as well.

6.3.3 Generalisability

The aim of the thesis is not to provide with general conclusions that would be applicable on
the whole ecotourism industry although we do try to find some common features and
practices of the ecotourism operators in Sweden. Instead, we are aiming for a higher purpose
of understanding the different respondents’ context and practical work. We acknowledge that
there are many factors affecting the decision and behavior of the ecotourism operators in
Sweden. Therefore, we believe that the results of this thesis are indicating that further
research is needed in this field and an example would be to interview more ecotourism
operators in order to provide with general results, if that would be suitable. In this case, our
study can be applied on the research further pursued and help provide with suggestions on
how to a research in this specific field as well as continue on the specific conclusions we have found to investigate more.
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Appendix

Appendix 1: Nature’s Best criteria

(Simplified version adopted from Nature’s Best - The guide to a better travel experience) (SES et al, 2002)

1. Respect the limitations of the destination – minimize negative impact on nature and culture

Basic criteria:

The tour operator:
1.1.1 The tour operator and his subcontractors all know the destination very well.
1.1.2 A travel destination analysis has been made in writing and is attached to the application.
1.1.3 All local subcontractors and guides have received a specific list of what is expected of them by the tour operator, for each activity that is to be labelled as ecotourism.
1.1.4 Subcontractors and/or guides are informed that the visitors may be asked to respond to questions about fulfilment of the ecotourism criteria.

The tour product:
1.2.1 The travel destination analysis governs how the activity is to be carried out.
1.2.2 The group size depends on the sensitivity of the area to be visited, on environmental factors, and on the safety as well as the general quality of the visitor experience.
1.2.3 A The landowner has been contacted.
1.2.3 B The landowner has been contacted, unless entry only is of slight importance, or if there are too many different landowners involved. Please motivate, in this case.
1.2.4 In places where the tour operator's visitation is concentrated, or recurrent, the tour operator has an agreement in writing with the landowner.
1.2.5 All landowners receive signed agreements, if they wish.
1.2.6 On public lands in reindeer herding areas, permission for your tour/type of activity has been received from the County Administration.
1.2.7 Local regulations and recommendations for protected areas are always respected.
1.2.8 If there is a risk that the activity might contribute to direct environmental damage, the tour operator will refrain from carrying out the activity.
1.2.9 All activities are based upon a ecologically sustainable and ethically acceptable usage of the resource.
1.2.10 The nature conservation authorities have been contacted, to make sure sensitive nature values will not be disturbed through negligence.
1.2.11 Hunting tours, sports fishing tours and other special activities are to be evaluated.
1.2.12 If feeding of wildlife is done for observation purposes, this must be done with the expressed permission of the landowner, the owner of hunting rights, and the authorities. The feeding will be done in carefully chosen and undisturbed areas, in ways that will not disturb neighbours and other users of the area, that does not hurt growing forest or crops, does not increase the risk of traffic accidents, nor change the natural behaviour of the wildlife.
1.2.13 The specific needs for the reindeer husbandry is respected, especially during the critical periods.

Bonus criteria:

The tour operator:
1.3.1 The tour operator will provide each employee of the company paid leave for one day a year to further his or her knowledge about ecotourism.

The tour product:
1.4.1 Contracts have been signed with all affected landowners.
1.4.2 Nature conservation organisations and authorities, local NGOs, and different local key personalities have been contacted.
1.4.3 Codes of conduct and clear distance limits are used for determining how close and how obtrusively different species of wildlife may be observed.

2. Support the local economy

Basic criteria:

The tour operator:
2.1.1 There is a company policy to give local colour to all activities, like food, lodging, transportation and guiding.
2.1.2 The operator contributes to, or takes part in some kind of local development work.

The tour product:
2.2.1 During the activity as much as possible of the products and services are purchased locally. Give a rough estimate in percentages of the total purchases that are done locally.
2.2.2 Visitors are encouraged to buy locally produced and sold products.

Bonus criteria:

The tour operator:
2.3.1 The company is both registered and taxed within the area of the destination.
2.3.2 The percentage of staff and personnel costs that were paid last year to local staff and local subcontractors was higher than 50%.

The tour product:
2.4.1 In cases where large parts of the tour product are purchased through a subcontractor, the subcontractor is registered and taxed within the area of the destination.
2.4.2 The percentage of locally purchased products and services was higher than 50% of the total. Please state the approximate percentage of, respectively: food, lodging, local transportation, services, other.

3. Make all the company's operations environmentally sustainable

Basic criteria:

The tour operator:
3.1.1 The tour operator has his own, written environmental plan, describing the impact of his operations on the environment. It is attached to the application
3.1.2 The environmental plan includes a specific list of all the improvements that need to be done, and the date by which they shall be implemented.
3.1.3 The tour operator's environmental plan is available for all interested customers.
3.1.4 The tour operator has a specific controller in charge of the regular environmental audit of the company's activities.
3.1.5 When new purchases are being made, the choice goes to the best available environmentally friendly technology and materials.
3.1.6 When buying paper, chemicals, food or office supplies, the choice goes to the best available eco-labelled or certified alternatives.
3.1.7 There are routines for waste disposal, and all waste is source separated and recycled, when possible.
3.1.8 Disposable articles are avoided.
3.1.9 At request, the operator will produce all information needed to make an estimate of the environmental impact of the company's transportation to and from the destination, as well as during the activity.

The tour product:
3.2.1 The operator strives towards using eco-friendly accommodations.
3.2.2 Eco-labelled lodgings are used whenever possible.
3.2.3 Regularly used lodgings are influenced into getting eco-labelled.
3.2.4 The operator strives towards using KRAV-labelled, and/or locally produced food.
3.2.5 Train and bus transportation is actively offered to the customer, where this is possible.
3.2.6 The itineraries of all tours are adapted to the timetabled arrivals – when available - of more environmentally friendly modes of transport.
3.2.7 When using air transport, first choice always goes to companies that have an expressed environment policy or program, and who invest in fuel-saving engines with less emissions and noise.
3.2.8 Transportation of visitors, materials, supplies and food are as efficiently co-ordinated as possible.
3.2.9 Local transportation is done with the environmentally best, and most resource-saving transport systems available.
3.2.10 Motorized transportation is limited. Motor vehicles can be used for transportation to and from the site, and during the activity, on condition that they are not the main attraction in themselves, and that a better, more eco-friendly means of transportation is not available.
3.2.11 When investing in new motorized vehicles, the most eco-friendly engines are preferred.
3.2.12 All the operator's two stroke engines are to be replaced with four-stroke engines, or other engines with the same or lower fuel-consumption, that have a lower degree of noise.
3.2.13 More eco-friendly fuels and oils are used throughout the operation.
3.2.14 Cars used during the tours are at the oldest from 1993. Buses used are at the oldest from 1991.
3.2.15 Helicopters and small aircraft are avoided. Exemption to this rule can be given for transfers to and from activities where there is no other means of transport available.
3.2.16 If using helicopter transportation, with exemption from the rules, the helicopters used shall preferably be of the kind with improved combustion, lower amounts of emissions and less noise-producing.
3.2.17 Other visitors' nature experience is respected, and a “Minimum disturbance”-policy is used.
3.2.18 The tour operator strives to undertake all transportation of material in roadless land during low season and with the lowest possible impact or disturbance.
3.2.19 If a motor driven electric generator is used, it is sound-insulated and positioned in a way that the emissions do not disturb. Only environmentally classified fuel is used.
3.2.20 When choosing subcontractors, clear and concise environmental demands are made. The Basic criteria for the tour operator, under paragraph 3 in regard to environment issues, are also valid for all co-operation partners.
3.2.21 Lighting of campfires in the outdoors is always done with judgement and according to local rules and regulations, seasons and the predisposition of the terrain.
3.2.22 Insecticides or herbicides are avoided.

Bonus criteria:

The tour operator:
3.3.1 Lodgings used by the tour operator have already been eco-labelled by the Nordic eco-label Svanen (the Swan)/Green Key/Green Globe/ISO 14001 or other equivalent environmental certification systems for lodging. Please attach a copy of the certificate.
3.3.2 The tour operator's permanent staff have undergone shorter, in-house environment education/training course and know the contents of the company's environment plan.
3.3.3 Travel logs are kept for all vehicles.
3.3.4 The environment controller has undergone some form of training in the requirements of the Swedish Environment Code.
3.3.5 If the company has several offices, there is an environment controller among the staff at each workplace.
3.3.6 The tour operator uses energy from local, renewable sources.
3.3.7 The tour operator's energy needs are mainly covered by energy from renewable sources.
3.3.8 Electricity is, where possible, of an eco-labelled kind, like renewable energy sources.
3.3.9 All waste is separated at the source and recycled.
3.3.10 All organic waste is composted.
3.3.11 The tour operator's environmental plan is accessible on the Internet and/or is easily available in print.

The tour product:
3.4.1 No motorized transportation is included in the local tour/travel product.
3.4.2 The tour operator co-operates locally/regionally to promote the development of areas in which the usage of motor vehicles is forbidden or highly restricted, and other zones in which it is admitted.
3.4.3 Electrical boat engines are used instead of fuel driven combustion engines.
3.4.4 Only cars that have the highest environmental classification are used.
3.4.5 Car and bus drivers have been trained in fuel-efficient driving, so called Eco-driving.
3.4.6 Transportation to and from the destination is done by train and/or bus.
3.4.7 Lodgings are built so as not to disturb the surrounding natural landscape in any significant way.
3.4.8 Lodgings are built with local building materials.
3.4.9 Lodgings are built in accordance with local building traditions.
3.4.10 When refurbishing or constructing a new building, all materials are FSC-labelled, environmentally adapted and/or of local production.
3.4.11 The construction site is rehabilitated, and revegetated with naturally occurring native species.

4. Contribute actively to conservation

Basic criteria:
The tour operator:
4.1.1 Support is given to some kind of nature conservation/culture conservation programs, or to nature conservation organisations/projects, preferably local ones.
4.1.2 The tour operator is a member, or equivalent, of a nature conservation organisation.

The tour product:
4.2.1 The tour operator bridges information about the most suitable channels to support different conservation projects to visitors who want to give economic or practical support to nature conservation initiatives at the destination.

Bonus criteria:
The tour operator:
4.3.1 In the work with the Travel destination analysis consideration is also taken to external threats, like deforestation projects, planned road constructions or applications for concessions. When found, these threats are taken note of, together with the way in which they threaten the destination's ecological and cultural values. The operator closely follows the development.
4.3.2 Nature conservation organisations are offered promotion space in the tour operator's marketing materials, on web sites, in brochures, mailings etc.
4.3.3 The tour operator contributes with information about potential threats within the destination, so that the nature conservation opinion can be kept informed.

The tour product:
4.4.1 Elements of practical nature conservation work is offered during the activity. All in co-operation and in agreement with nature conservation authorities and landowners.
4.4.2 The tour operator and its staff strive to actively interpret knowledge about, and respect for the destination's natural and cultural values to the travellers.
4.4.3 The tour operator underlines the importance of every single visitor's own responsibility to treat local people in a respectful way, and of working to avoid environmental damage.

5. Promote the joy of discovery, knowledge and respect

Basic criteria:
The tour operator:
5.1.1 The tour operator has made sure that all staff with visitor contact, and especially guides and tour leaders, have good knowledge about the destination's natural and cultural values.
5.1.2 Explicit information about the destination is readily available in the tour operator's marketing materials (brochures, web site etc).
5.1.3 Special care is taken to ensure that the tour operator's guides and tour leaders perform high quality guiding and nature interpretation.

The tour product:
5.2.1 Travellers who make reservations in advance, receive full pre-tour information about the tour and the destination, together with a list of suggested reading, a list of equipment and Codes of conduct.
5.2.2 The tour product includes some kind of personal encounter/guiding/instruction by skilled staff. Depending on the kind of travel product, this guiding can vary from an introductory lecture to full guiding throughout the tour. All visitors are informed about the destination, Codes of conduct and about the rights and obligations under the Right of Public Access.
5.2.3 The tour operator and its staff strive to actively interpret knowledge about, and respect for the destination's natural and cultural values to the travellers.
5.2.4 The tour operator underlines the importance of every single visitor's own responsibility to treat local people in a respectful way, and of working to avoid environmental damage.
5.2.5 Codes of conduct are used and explained to the participants. They can include:
- Local conservation regulations, appropriate behaviour in sensitive habitats, wildlife encounters, finding fragile and rare plants.
- Recommendations and local regulations regarding camping, making fires, latrines, waste disposal, cleaning.
- The Right of Public Access in general and specifically during the tour.
- Rules for access to historical places and/or areas with on-going scientific research.
- Special considerations during the time of the visit, e.g. during the nesting season.
- Respect for the local people and their industries.

5.2.6 In groups without guides, the group appoints one participant as responsible for its environmental impact during the tour. In groups without guides, all participants undersign that they have been informed about the operator's Codes of conduct.

5.2.7 The guide in charge has the relevant education, or equivalent, and is knowledgeable about the destination and the travel product.

Bonus criteria:
The tour product:
5.4.1 Skilled guides or tour leaders always accompany the group/traveller.
5.4.2 Guiding is offered also in other languages than English.
5.4.3 Group size is limited to a maximum of 15 people per guide, in consideration of the quality of the customer's travel experience.
5.4.4 Lecturers and guides are recruited among research fellows, wildlife rangers, indigenous and/or local people.
5.4.5 A travel library is available during the tour.

6. Quality and safety all the way through

Basic criteria:
The tour operator:
6.1.1 The tour operator has a minimum of two years of professional experience of nature tourism.
6.1.2 The tour operator is registered with the Swedish tax authorities, and has a registered VAT- and organisation number.
6.1.3 The company has a liability insurance.
6.1.4 The company, where needed, has a travel guarantee in accordance with the Travel Guarantees Act.
6.1.5 The tour operator practices responsible marketing which creates appropriate customer expectations on destinations and activities.
6.1.6 The tour operator continuously works at improving the quality of the operation.
6.1.7 The tour operator conducts business with honest payment ethics.

The tour product:
6.2.1 The tour operator has the necessary insurance coverage for the business activities.
6.2.2 Labelled tours are founded on active and serious safety-work. Potentially risky activities are guided by specifically trained and skilled guides.
6.2.3 During more adventurous activities the specially recommended, trade-specific security measures are followed.
6.2.4 Routines and back-up plans exist for the unexpected and unwanted. The tour operator asks all participants to state eventual health problems that may be of importance during the tour in order to improve the quality of the travel experience, and the participant's own safety.
6.2.5 Minimum one guide on all guided tours is trained to provide First Aid, CPR.
6.2.6 There are routines for receiving and evaluating post-trip customer feed-back forms, proposals and criticism.
6.2.7 The participants are informed about the possibility of directly contacting the Labelling Committee with opinions about the tour.
6.2.8 For those participants who want to contact the committee, information about its direct address is readily available on the tour operator's web site, or printed marketing/information material.
6.2.9 If domestic animals are used during the activities, they are treated with dignity and respect, in accordance with the regulations of the Swedish Animal Protection Act and with high held ethical ambitions for animal-keeping.
6.2.10 The keeping of domestic animals has undergone inspection and has been approved by the inspector for animal protection/veterinary/environment inspector. The inspection protocol can be produced upon request.
6.2.11 Safe and working communication tools are available when travelling in the wilderness. This means FRS radios/walkie-talkies, communication radios, cellphones or satellite phones.
6.2.12 The tour operators' own comments upon what characterises their way of taking care of the customer:

Bonus criteria:
The tour operator:
6.3.1 Offers packages and priced products, ready-to-book.
6.3.2 Co-operates with other travel businesses in order to offer joint ready-to-book packages and priced products.
6.3.3 The tour operator has a web site on the Internet.

The tour product:
6.4.1 All field staff are trained and know how to provide First Aid, CPR.
6.4.2 Customers are asked to fill in a post-trip questionnaire, including questions about how the tour was carried out, and in which there is ample space for suggestions of improvement.
6.4.3 Customer questionnaires also include questions about the operators' environmental performance and about their different ecotourism qualities.
6.4.4 Each customer questionnaire is followed up by the environment controller, and also by the tour producer. The questionnaires are later available at the tour operator's offices in case of a quality audit.
6.4.5 Safety and Rescue routines exist and the Swedish Rescue Service has been notified.
Appendix 2: Interview guide

BACKGROUND OF COMPANY

1. Why did you start the tour operating business? What do you want to achieve by running your business?
2. Besides tour operations, do you have any other business or job around the year?
3. How many permanent, part-time, seasonal and freelance employees does your company hire in year?
4. What and how many kinds of tours (with and without Nature’s Best label) have you organized in a year?
5. Where do most of your customers come from?

ECOTOURISM FROM ECOTOURISM OPERATOR’S POINT OF VIEW

6. Can you explain ecotourism, in your own words?
7. What are the good outcomes that can be brought from ecotourism?
8. When and why did you apply for the Nature’s Best?
9. Are the criteria reasonable and easy to achieve? Which parts are more difficult?
10. After achieving the Nature’s Best label, are there any differences in your attitude towards ecotourism and your way of running the company now?
11. Do you think the Nature’s Best is useful and important in any aspect?
12. Have you observed any change in the:
   i. natural environment;
   ii. local society; and
   iii. economic situation
   around your activity area in the past 10 years?
13. Do you think the changes are related to tourism?

BENEFITS GAINED FROM ECOTOURISM

14. What are the most important economic benefits your company can gain from ecotourism?
15. Through organizing eco-tours, what are the most important benefits that ecotourism can bring to your local community and society?
16. From environment conservation’s point of view, what can ecotourism contribute to the nature and wildlife the most?
17. As an ecotourism operator, among environmental, economical, social and any other issues, what do you think is the most important, the second and so on?
18. Do you find any conflicts or contradictions in between them?
19. Do you think ecotourism can benefit all aspects at the same time?
20. How do your eco-tours help to provide with most benefits for each perspective (i.e. environmental, social, economic and others)?
MANAGING BENEFITS GAINED FROM ECOTOURISM

21. How do you balance the economic benefits and environmental concerns?
22. How do you balance the economic benefits and social concerns?
23. How do you balance the environmental and social concerns?

THROUGHOUT THE GUIDING TOURS / IN PRACTICE

24. Is it common that you set a target for your company profit every year?
   i. Are there any limitations in your business?
25. Do you limit the amount of tourists visiting?
   i. Who and how to judge the limitation of number of visitors around your touring area in the nature?
26. What is important to consider when arranging an eco-tour?
27. Do you think that your eco-tours affect the natural environment and local society in any way?
   i. What have you done to try to minimize the negative impact from your tours and the visitors in the nature?
28. Do you or the tour guide follow your customers throughout the whole tour?
29. What do you think the visitors and your customers can or know about environmental issues?
30. Do tourists often have the basic knowledge about the local culture before visiting?
31. What kind of special information do you provide or educate your customers with?
32. Have you collected feedback and comments from the customers about your eco-tours?
33. Can your eco-tours be improved to gain better outcomes for the nature, society and economy from ecotourism?