ABSTRACT

A GEOGRAPHIC EXAMINATION OF STAKEHOLDERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF ECOTOURISM ALONG THE ISRAEL NATIONAL TRAIL AND JESUS TRAIL IN ISRAEL

by Lisa Dershowitz

The Israel National Trail and Jesus Trail are fascinating examples for geographers to look at in terms of sustainable tourism development. Interviews and participant observation conducted show that hikers and personnel along the trails are becoming more aware of issues within sustainability such as large amounts of trash and lack of water. Surveys conducted show the hikers along these trails are not doing much to be sustainable. These results can be seen from a lack of education and understanding of ecotourism along Israel’s trails. Ecotourism is a fast growing sector of tourism and can offer ways to help preserve Israel’s Trails environment, culture, as well as help out areas economically. By using the approach of surveys, interviews, and participant observation, this thesis examines how stakeholders perceive and address aspects of ecotourism along the Israel National Trail and Jesus Trail in Israel, focusing on the Lower Galilee and Negev Region.
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List of Abbreviations

Israel National Trail- INT

Society for Protection of Nature in Israel- Society for Protection of Nature in Israel

Jewish National Fund- JNF

Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael- Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael

Israel Defense Forces- IDF
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Introduction to Trails and Ecotourism

Ecotourism is the fastest growing sector within the tourism industry. This type of tourism defined as “the practice of low-impact educational, ecologically and culturally sensitive travel that benefits local communities and host countries” (Honey 1999). Within ecotourism trails and National Trails are becoming more and more popular and they haven’t all been fully explored. People typically think of Israel as a place which is home to major religious sites and unrest but not about the beautiful trails including the Israel National Trail & Jesus Trail. However, even though Israel has a fully developed economy, the country does not have a fully developed landscape creating an odd combination and fragile environment. In addition, tourism has not been a main focus by the Israeli government as it is not the number one activity, leaving way for the environment and cultures of Israel to be properly cared for. This is why looking at trails specifically the Israel National Trail and its sustainability we can learn new aspects and make new contributions to ecotourism and National Trail literature.

This research focuses on how the trails of Israel meet ecotourism criteria focusing on The Israel National Trail (abbreviated INT) from a stakeholder perspective and also examining the Jesus Trail. This question is examined from an environmental, social, and economic perspective of geography. The study sites consist of the Lower Galilee Region along the Israel National Trail and Jesus Trail along with the Negev Region along the Israel National Trail. Specifically the research will focus on Yarok Az also known as the Green Goat Eco-Lodge and organic farm near Illaniya, Israel and at the Green Backpackers hostel located in Mitzpe Ramon in the negev. In these areas 35 surveys of hikers were conducted, allowing the view of the tourists to be better studied by the researcher. In addition, the main focus was on conducting interviews with local tourist related personnel in the areas and those involved with the trails. Lastly to better understand how the trails of Israel meet ecotourism criteria I engaged in participant observation, working first hand at the Eco-Lodge and a backpacker’s hostel while also hiking various sections of the trail. Field work was conducted in Israel during the hot summer months from May through
August 2013. Overall, I find that my research adds to the geographical literature on ecotourism. In addition, the research adds to literature on the Lower Galilee Region, Negev Region, the Israel National Trail and Jesus Trail. Many are unaware of the INT even though National Geographic named it one of the best hikes in 2012 (Feingold 2012). These regions are important to study as they offer beautiful landscapes full of very different environment and cultural heritages that can dated back long ago. As tourism steadily increases in Israel, many look to sustainable tourism as the solution to the preservation of Israel’s cultural and natural resources.

Goals of Research

By conducting my research I have several goals to achieve. My primary goal is to contribute to geographic literature on ecotourism and on trails. In addition, the research contributes to the geographic literature on the peripheral areas of Israel. Another goal is to understand what can be done for improvements in the sustainability of the trail so that future generations can continue to enjoy the trail. Lastly I plan to help spread insight on the Israel National Trail & Jesus Trail which has not been brought to attention of many international hikers.

Research Question

How do perceptions and practices of stakeholders on the Israel National Trail and Jesus Trail affect the sustainability of the trails?

My research question is important as it allows us to understand overall stakeholder perceptions and practices on sustainability and ecotourism of the Israel National Trail and Jesus. This is found essential to bettering the ecotourism development along trails as one can understand what stakeholders would like to see. Several methods are used to answer my research question including participant observation, interviews, and surveys. During summer 2013 I traveled to the Lower Galilee Region and Mitzpe Ramon for my research. There I lived at an eco-lodge called Yarok Az located in the North on the Moshav Illaniya. The founder of Yarok Az has a master’s degree in geography with an interest in ecotourism. I also spent time volunteering at a hostel called the Green Backpackers known for being sustainable, located in Mitzpe Ramon in the Negev Region of southern Israel. While staying at the two places, I participated in various ecotourism activities such as farming and cheese making that helps put
organic food on the table for meals for personnel and guest in Illaniya, and educating people more about ways to preserve the Macktesh and our environment in Mitzpe Ramon. At the lodge I interacted with guests hiking the Jesus Trail that runs through the area. My stay there included exploring Illaniya and trips to nearby towns such as Nazareth and Cana for participant observation at the various sites such as the first century synagogue. In addition I conducted interviews with various tourism related personnel. I was also able to go on hikes to the various sections of the Lower Galilee part of the Israel National Trail and Jesus Trail to observe, participate, and hand out surveys. By researching activities I gain a better understanding of the hikers’ and personnel’s views on ecotourism in the area, along with a more personal feel for the main stakeholders of ecotourism in the area. Through the fieldwork I gained a better sense for what activities are actually happening along and near the trail that are actually sustainable. By doing my research, I can then identify potential areas where ecotourism implementation may help sustain the region.

**Outline of Chapters**

**Chapter 2: Study Area**

In this section the history and background of the Israel National Trail & Jesus Trail are profiled. The Israel National Trail extends all across Israel from the Lebanese border specifically at Kibbutz Dan, all the way down to Eila in the South. The Society for Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI) founded the trail and Israeli President Ezer Weizmann officially installed the Trail in 1994. Parts of the trail have been changed slightly due to security risk and development for the safety of the hikers. Due to the large area that the trail covers, the focus of this research will be on the lower Galilee Region and Negev desert. The Jesus Trail is a much newer trail created in 2009 and is only 65 km (Village to Village, 2013). The Jesus Trail starts in the Northern town of Nazareth and goes until Capernaum allowing hikers to walk in the footsteps of Jesus & or experience a different part of Israel from the norm. It goes through many religious sites not just of Christianity but sites of Islam, Judaism, and Druze. In addition, in this chapter there will be discussion about my study area of Yarok Az Eco lodge and the Green Backpackers in Mitzpe Ramon.
Chapter 3- Methods and Literature Review

In this section the methodology will be discussed on how it was used in approaching my research questions. I interviewed workers of various tourism related businesses along the Israel National Trail & Jesus Trail in the lower Galilee region & Mitzpe Ramon in the south to get a better understanding on their thoughts of ecotourism development and planning. I also augmented 35 Surveys which were also distributed to tourists and hikers along and near the trails to get a sense if they would like to see more ecotourism in the area. In addition, I conducted participant observation by working at an eco lodge and sustainable hostel, hiking, and participating in various other ecotourism activities in the area, along with hiking sections of the INT and Jesus Trail in the Galilee region and the INT in Mitzpe Ramon in the Southern Region.

Finally in this chapter I discuss my literature review. The three concepts of sustainability, development, and environment in geography and tourism will be discussed as the main topic.

There are many issues of ecotourism examined in this chapter as well. Currently there is no standard set for what qualifies something as eco or green. This can cause problems for example of companies jumping on the ecotourism bandwagon and claiming the title but actually having negative impacts on an area. In addition, there are issues with how to properly plan ecotourism which I will discuss more with my various perspectives.

Chapter 4- Environmental perspective

In this section I discuss how the hikers and personnel along the Israel National Trail and Jesus Trail meet ecotourism criteria from an environmental perspective. I discuss how the ecology and landscape of the Galilee region and Mitzpe Ramon is being taken into consideration for future conservation for other generations to enjoy. I make observations on the natural elements in danger of disappearing and what is being done to protect them and how the Israel National Trail impacts them.

Chapter 5 Socio- Cultural perspective

In this section I discuss how the Israel National Trail and Jesus Trail affects various local communities and how the tourism personnel and hikers view the trail. I examine how the trail
may better their lives or cause opposite impacts. In addition, I discuss how the people of these communities view the trail and how it has or has not helped preserve their culture.

Chapter 6-Economic perspective

In this section I examine the economic side of the Israel National Trail and Jesus Trail. Are the services around the Trail able to create an income from it from the view of the hikers and personnel? I observe if businesses only get seasonal benefits, or does it have no effect on them. In addition, I discuss how travelers view the trail economically such as if they view the services being too pricey throughout it or great for budget travelers.

Chapter 7- Analysis and Conclusions

Here I discuss how much the Israel National Trail and Jesus Trail actually meets ecotourism criteria from an economic, environmental, and social perspective based on my observations and stakeholders’ views. I examine the contributions of this study to the geographical literature on trails and ecotourism. I make my own conclusions on what can be done to better the Israel National trail and the services around it in a more eco-friendly way.

Conclusion

With ecotourism being such a fast growing sector in the tourism industry it offers much potential to help preserve a place such as Israel’s Trails which cover many of diverse landscapes and cultures for future generations to enjoy. This makes it very important to understand how stakeholders view ecotourism and is being affected by it so that areas are not further destroyed. This is why my thesis is aimed at answering how the trails of Israel meet ecotourism criteria from a stakeholder perspective. However, as this is a very broad topic I will answer this question from an environmental, socio-cultural, and economic perspective to best understand everything. In addition, by examining the Israel National Trail and Jesus Trail in the Lower Galilee and Negev Region new literature on these more so untouched areas will be useful for future geographic literature. Lastly, this introduction chapter lies out and outline from what all will be looked at in answering my research questions and the results that have come out of them.
Chapter 2

Study Areas

Study Areas:

Israel National Trail:

By understanding the background on ecotourism I am now able to discuss the specific area that I will be focusing on of the Israel National Trail see above in Figure 2.1. The idea for the Israel National Trail also known as Shvil Y’israel שיביל ישרויא came from a hiker by the name of Avraham Yamir after he hiked the Appalachian trail in the early 1980s (Vilnay, 2010). Together with the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI), Jewish National Fund (JNF), Israel’s Nature and Parks Authority, and the Israeli Ministry of Tourism and Education, the trail was formed after 15 years of planning. The trail stretches from North to South of Israel totaling approximately 620 miles and avoids areas of dispute such as Gaza and the West Bank (Vilnay 2010). The trails starts depending on which direction you are going in at either Kibbutz Dan or the Taba border crossing to Egypt in Eilat (Personnel TG-F). It is comprised of 12 different sections including the Mount Tabor and Tzippori stream and along the Ramon Macktesh. The Israeli government dedicated the trail in 1995 so that Israelis could experience their country themselves (SPNI, 2014). The trail is marked by three main colors throughout with white, blue, and orange. Few paths have caused construction of the INT which can be seen as an outcome from the rush to finish the trail that caused it to follow the highway for most of the Negev. When the trail was being created, they found it very important to just finish the trail first and later make it visually pleasing. The INT is quite important for Israel, Shay Rabineau who has focused his studies and doctoral research on the subject believes this is “Because hiking is something that crosses such a big sector of society, this is not a minor part of Israeli history…. it cuts to the heart of the Israeli experience to the land,” (Bryan 2013).
Figure 2.1: Israel National Trail Map

(Smith, N.D.)
Figure 2.2 Map of Israel with Case Sites

Made by Lisa Dershowitz, 2014
Mitzpe Ramon

My main research area was the small town of Mitzpe Ramon meaning the Roman lookout which is located in Southern Israel also known as the Negev founded in 1951 (Robinson et al 2012). It can be seen in Figure 2.4. The town is located on top of Macktesh Ramon which is one of seven and the largest Macktesh in the world. A Macktesh is similar to that of a crater but is different as it was formed by rivers. In addition, Mitzpe Ramon was built as part of Ben Gurion’s vision for southern Israel to be developed and move people across the land. He understood economic potential of the area and how there was a need for towns so that if they were ever attacked from Egypt there would be nobody to stop them until they reached Tel Aviv. (Dvir 2012) (Personnel B-H). With the vision, Mitzpe was then built right along route 90 which later led to the Israel National Trail being directed through it. In addition, it is also just off of Hwy 40 to Eilat which is famously built in order to have less dangerous roads that are not along the borders of Egypt and Jordan (Personnel B-H). The town is home to approximately 5,000 residents with almost half involved in tourism (Rozenberg 2012). Only a small percentage of Israel’s population even lives in the Negev region so it is quite common to see small populated towns (Personnel B-H). However, the residents are also relatively poorer and have a higher unemployment rate with many living on welfare, the town having about 9-10% unemployment rate (Rozenberg 2012) (Personnel B-H). The town is also known for corruption within the municipality council as until this year has been run by the same people for ten years straight. As a result Mitzpe has not reached its full tourism potential according to several towns people. More recently ecotourism has been growing in the town with many coming to hike and explore the Macktesh and easy access by Jeep, bike or foot to Nabataean ruins. Figure 2.3 shows Mitzpe Ramon and the activities it has to offer. As one can tell it is hand drawn and not labeled well but is the main English Map for the town that is free and is handed out at the Green Backpackers Hostel.
Figure 2.3 Map of Mitzpe Ramon: The 🌟 represents the Green Backpackers Hostel and the ✏️ represents entrances into Macktesh Ramon

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(Green Backpackers, N.D.)
Green Backpackers Hostel

While in Mitzpe I was able to continue my research at the Green Backpackers hostel. It was opened in 2011 after personnel B-H realized how much potential a hostel in the beautiful area had to offer with great hikes and weather. Personnel B-H also believes that, “all tourism in Israel should be eco-friendly and we are smart enough today to realize this is the way to go and that tourists waste the most amount of resources which is why I choose to open a hostel and not something luxurious “(Personnel B-H). The name however, is not deemed green for being sustainable, but actually it is named after former Prime Minister David Ben Gurion and his original last name before moving to Israel. This is quite important to the owners as if it hadn’t been for him and his dream about the south none of the south would be developed.

Ben Gurion “The Negev is where the people of Israel will be tested, ‘and we are fulfilling that dream.” (Moshe Gilad 2012)

The hostel mainly targets foreign backpackers (which is something new that Israel is seeing by a group of hostels) and hikers account for 80% of their guest (Personnel B-H) (Rozenberg, 2012). The hostel was built with sustainability in mind and much of it was second hand even if it did cost more to bring down from the center of Israel. The name Green comes from Israel’s first Prime Minister David Ben Gurion’s first last name before he changed it after immigrating to Israel. The name was chosen as he has been a role model for personnel B-H and is a main reason for Mitzpe Ramon to be in existence. Mitzpe Ramon has an extreme difference in weather at night and can become very windy due to the surrounding landscape.

Macktesh Ramon

Mitzpe Ramon lies within the Ramon Macktesh which is the largest in the world at “38km long, 6km wide, and 450 meters deep”, even though there is Macktesh Gadol, which translates to Large Macktesh which occurred due to the order they were discovered (Mitzpe Ramon Visitor Center & UNESCO). A Macktesh is not to be confused with crater as it was created by erosion unlike a crater (UNESCO). There are currently seven total Macktesh in the world. Five of them are located in southern Israel and the other two in Sinai Peninsula of Egypt (Mitzpe Ramon Visitor Center Fieldwork). This also gives way for the Ramon Macktesh nature Reserve also known as the Har Negev Nature Reserve being the largest in Israel. Macktesh
Ramon, where I focused my studies, was created about 5 billion years ago (Dvir, 2012). Those hiking in the reserve are legally required to stay on marked paths and not damage any plants seen (Visitor Center Fieldwork). A small section of the Macktesh Ramon is restricted from everything so that future generations can enjoy it. A list of activities along and inside the Macktesh and how accessible they are for hikers and tourists to reach is listed below in Figure 2.6.

Table 2.6: Sights in Mitzpe Ramon in or along Macktesh Ramon

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Easily Accessible</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ammonite Wall</td>
<td>An ancient wall filled with fossils tat hikers may see.</td>
<td>Easy/ Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prisms</td>
<td>also known as the Carpentry- unique sandstone hill on floor of Macktesh which look like prisms</td>
<td>Easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Cisterns</td>
<td>Many ancient cisterns from Israelite period along roads</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camel Hill Promenade</td>
<td>Beautiful view on Ramon Macktesh</td>
<td>Easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sculpture Garden</td>
<td>Beautiful view on Ramon Macktesh and sculptures by Israeli Artists</td>
<td>Easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saharonim caravansary</td>
<td>Ancient Nabataean ruins along the incense route</td>
<td>Difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitor Center</td>
<td>Showcases movie and exhibit on Ilan Ramon and Movie on the creation of Ramon Macktesh</td>
<td>Easy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Figure 2.4 Macktesh Ramon Map

(Israel National Parks Map, N.D.)
Jesus Trail

The other trail I examined is the Jesus Trail Created by Maoz Inon and David Landis. Unlike the INT it was created more recently in 2009 and is only 65km, which allows hikers with just anywhere from a few days to a couple weeks to complete it (Village to Village 2013). The Jesus Trail came from both creators realizing the potential Israel had for a new smaller branded trail that can take hikers in the far less traveled North and also help out towns such as Illaniya, Cana, and in particular Nazareth. The hike starts from Nazareth where Personnel C-D also co owns the Fauzi Azar Hostel and goes until you reach Capernaum (Raz 2013). The trail allows hikers to follow in the footsteps of Jesus for a religious experience not just for Christianity but it also passes through Holy sites for Christians, Muslims, Jews, and Druze (Jesus Trail Website). The Jesus Trail however, is not just for religious hikers but all who are interested in anything from archeology or just nature in general. The SPNI works with the Jesus Trail and is in charge of blazing it for hikers. The trail was finished in 2009 for Pope Benedict XVI’s visit and has also been seen by other personnel such as former Prime Minister of United Kingdom Tony Blair who walked the first section of the trail & the Lonely Planet founder Tony Wheeler (Village to Village 2013 and Personnel C-D). Hikers can see many sites from Basilica of Annunciation a holy site for Christians in Nazareth, to Nebi Sh‘eib one of the holiest sites for the Druze (Raz 2013).
Sustainability has been a major focus of the Jesus Trail and it follows the principle of “Leave No Trace Behind (Village to Village, 2013). Overall, Personnel C-D finds that the trail should allow hikers to contribute to local economies and also have little impact on the nature that
they travel through. Lastly, the Jesus Trail also intersects with the Israel National Trail mainly from the section going from Arbel National Park to Mt. Tabor.

Yarok Az

Yarok Az Eco-Lodge, where I did some of my research, is located in the lower Galilee region in Moshav Illaniya, shown in figure 2.2. It is near the Israel National Trail but actually located along the newer Jesus Trail and it is run by personnel A-B and family. Personnel A-B is actually an ecotourism student of author Collins-Kreiner. The Eco-Lodge is also known as the Green Goat/ Strong Goat which is a play on words in Hebrew, which is also an Organic Goat Farm. There hikers are able to stay in a cabin, campsite or eco dome lodge on the farm. During my stay there I stayed mainly in an eco-dome but was also able to camp out and have a few nights in the cabin. If guests would like, they are able to participate in a few activities such as picking vegetables from the garden or learning more about permaculture and the sustainable ways around the farm such as the compost toilet. Personnel B-A also gives more of hands on experience to select groups such as a class from the local high school that then get to milk the goats and make cheese. During my stay I was able to participate in many activities involved with running and eco-lodge and organic farm. Twice a day I milked the goats and fed the various animals of; chickens, roosters, guinea pigs, goats, and horses. The owners had taken in a hurt baby goat while I was there in which I got to feed a bottle of milk three times a day. With so many animals there was also lots of cleaning and changing water also needed to be done. Yarok Az also has a garden in which needed to be weeded through quite often and vegetables picked and new ones planted. Also, with it being a place for tourists to come many more weeds and overall cleaning of the grounds was needed to be done daily to make the place look nicer. With so much milk being collected each day I helped personnel B-A make various types of goat cheese such as Labaneah and also yogurt for us to eat. Food at the farm for volunteers and the family was primarily all organic. During the right season (not during the summer) there are many vegetables in the garden to be eaten and fruit trees filled with anything from apples to figs can be found around the farm. The eggs are also taken from the chickens to feed both the family and volunteers. Guest are able to pick some vegetables from the garden if they would like and also pay a small fee for Personnel B-A to cook them some meals that may include goat cheese or
yogurt made straight from the farm. However, she discussed with me how many still desire certain foods such as peanut butter, so not everything for them is local or organic.

**Illaniya**

The Eco-Lodge is located on the Moshav of Illaniya previously known as Sejera which has an ancient history and is a Jewish village 111 years old and home to about 300 (Personnel BW-B & Village to Village, 2013). Moshav Illaniya can be seen in Figure 2.2. It was also Ben Gurion’s home in Israel for a short period, which is interesting that I would take my research along his path and also home to three IDF stations. There one can see a first century ancient spring and synagogue. In addition, there is a Menorah Cave and an Olive Press that has been covered up and may be difficult for tourists to see. Lastly the tiny village is approximately 15 minutes by car away from the Galilee Sea and the major city of Tiberius (Personnel B-A & Adar, 2002). There are many buses that can also take tourists to other towns such as Afula, or Nazareth. However, many are just coming for a place to spend Shabbat, or as a stopping point along the Jesus Trail that goes from Nazareth up to Capernaum.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, by conducting a combined methodology of surveys, interviews, and participant observation I am best able to understand how stakeholders view ecotourism along Israel’s Trails. These methods are commonly used within sustainability, ecotourism and trails discussion which allow a broad understanding of various people’s views on the trails and how sustainable they are. In addition, by understanding a background on the area of my case study sites I can best answer my research questions and add onto literature about these lesser known areas.
Chapter 3
Methodology and Literature Review

Introduction to Methods

In this chapter I discuss how I approached my research question, and the various methods I used to do so. To best answer my research question I conducted interviews in summer 2013 with workers of various businesses along the Israel National Trail, Jesus Trail, Lower Galilee region, and in Mitzpe Ramon to better understand their views of ecotourism development and planning. I also handed out surveys to tourists and hikers in the same areas in order to get a sense if they would like to see more ecotourism in the area. Lastly I conducted participant observation by working on various lodgings in the area along with hiking sections of the trail in the Galilee region.

Method 1: Surveys

The first method for conducting my research this summer was by the use of surveys that I handed out to tourists and hikers on and along trails in Israel. Surveys are a very common method by geographers when doing similar research on understanding ecotourism in an area and how stakeholders may view it (Reichel 2006 and Nick 2010). By handing out surveys it allowed me to gain a better understanding on how tourists view ecotourism in the area and what ways if any sustainability is practiced along both the Jesus Trail and Israel National Trail.

The surveys were comprised of several sections and questions were based on previously tested questions from other similar studies (Pham Hong Long, 2007 Collins-Kreiner 2010). First they allowed me to better understand the demographics of hikers in Israel including their country of residence, age, lodging they stayed at, and main purpose of visiting. Another section comprised of questions relating to ecotourism perceptions including if they picked their lodging based the eco-friendliness of the lodging, what aspects of the trail they viewed to be ecotourism, cultures they experienced, and how they went about simple tasks such as getting water and doing laundry. Hikers were also asked to use a 5 point Likert scale rating to show what type of development they would like to see more of such as lodging or transportation and also themes of tourism such as nature or bird watching. This can be seen in research done by Reichel, and Pham.
Hong Long 2007 & Pizam 2006. The overall, list of questions can be seen below in Figure 1.1, and will be discussed more in depth in my following chapters.

**Demographics of Hikers Surveyed**

I collected 35 surveys when doing my research this summer. Surveys were filled out by primarily hikers ages 18-25 & 55-65 the majorities of whom were female, and came from Germany, USA, Israel, other parts of Europe and Canada as seen below in Figure 1. The levels of education ranged greatly with majority of them having a College Degree as also seen below in Figure 2.1. In addition, majority of hikers I spoke with were not on any sort of tour. Lastly the surveys focused on getting a better sense of return tourism, if they would recommend the trail, and also how tourists heard of the trails which I will talk about more in chapter six. Due to conducting my research during the summer months there are not as many hikers out.

**Method 2: Interviews**

My second method was conducting interviews which are another common method in studying ecotourism, Sustainability, and trails (Reichel 2006 and Torbidoni 2011). I used questions with open ended discussions to gain the most information out of them (Duffy 2002). Throughout the summer I traveled from north to south in order to talk with local people along the trail and those involved with the trails and ecotourism, along with experts on the field (Collins-Kreiner 2010) throughout Israel. In order to contact many of the stakeholders I used the snowballing method as discussed by (Pizam 2002 and Timur 2009) in which I found my contacts by talking with people. When contacting each personnel, I explained my research, background on education, and my main purpose that I wanted to gain from our talk. In addition, I made sure to review the Institutional Review Board rules with them so they would understand that everything would be anonymous and hopefully feel more comfortable talking with me. However, many of those that I talked with wanted their name to be associated with their opinions and were very excited that someone was doing research on Israel and its trails. I was able to discuss with the twenty-eight people I interviewed, questions on how they viewed ecotourism and sustainability throughout Israel including discussions on if there was potential for it and why or why not. Majority of those that I interviewed were from Israel or had moved there in the past 20 years, were male, and were older than age 30. Also, many were Business owners but I also
interviewed a variety of other personnel as seen in Table 2.3 below. In addition, I was able to better understand how the trail system works in Israel and how the personnel view the main groups of hikers including (recent Israel Defense Forces soldiers, older hikers that do small segments each month, and others). I was also able to better understand the evolution of the trails and what was being done to help tourism and battle problems such as trash along trails which majority of the hikers I talked with complained about. This allowed me to better understand the effects tourism development and the trail has had on them along with their views towards ecotourism.

It is important to note how my interviewees throughout my chapters. Based on each interviewees job type they have been assigned a code as seen in table 3.1 and 3.2 below. This code will be marked in front of another letter assigned to the actual personnel, which will keep everyone’s identity confidential.

*Table 3.1: Interviewees by Occupation Type*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>28 Total Interviews</th>
<th>Business Owners</th>
<th>Tour Guide</th>
<th>Trails Committee</th>
<th>Trail Creators</th>
<th>NGO</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>National Parks Personnel</th>
<th>Business Workers:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20
Table 3.2 interviewee Code Identifiers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business Owner= B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tour Guide= TG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trails Committee= TC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business workers= BW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trail Creators= C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO=N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education= E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Parks Personnel= NP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples:

BW-B= Business Owner, name of Interviewee
C-D= Trail Creators, name of Interviewee
TC-G= Trail Creator, name of Interviewee
B-H= Business owner, name of Interviewee

Before each interview I asked permission to write down what we were discussing about and for it to be used in my thesis. This was done with the interviewee signing a consent form. The main questions I asked interviewees are listed below. However, they varied per interviewee based on the interviewee’s occupation and interest.

Method 3: Participant Observation

Participant observation is also a very common method when researching ecotourism that literature suggests it is very fitting for answering my question which led me to use it as my final method (Walter 2012 and Long 2012). I was able to do my participant observation by
participating on an ecological organic farm, Yarok Az, that hosted many hikers from the Jesus Trail. There I participated in various ecotourism activities such as cheese making, and organic farming. While on Yarok Az I was able to explore the Moshav and surrounding area including ancient sites such as a first century spring and Synagogue. I was able to hike various parts of the Jesus Trail, and visit other cities such as Nazareth and Cana along the Trail. In addition, I was also able to visit sites such as Mt. Tabor and Arbel which are also along the Israel National Trail. I also participated in volunteering at the Green Backpackers hostel in Mitzpe Ramon. There I was able to hike the many trails along the area including parts of the Israel National Trail. By volunteering I was also able to get easier access to many other ecotourism activities including participating in a Jeep Tour down into Macktesh Ramon to see areas hard to reach by foot including some Nabataean ruins. In addition with the recent addition of bikes to the hostel I was able to bike a section of the newly inducted Israel National Bike Trail. While there I was also able to explore the many sites hikers would see within the town such as the bio reserve and visitor center, along with nearby sites and hikes such as Avdat and Ein Akev reachable by bus, tourists with cars, and hitchhiking. Many of these sites would normally be able to be reached if hiking the Israel National Trail from Mitzpe Ramon but due to severely hot weather, it was not safe to do so during summer months. Lastly, by conducting participant observation, I was able to interact with local residents and get their insight on how they feel about sustainability of the trails. This is a common method seen in research done on tourism development (Long 2012).

By volunteering at the hostel I was able to see and learn many ways in which the hostel was made with sustainability in mind, especially when it came to fixing up the places whether it is from energy efficient lights, old VHS tapes being used as book holders, or educating tourists on the area. In addition I was able to help tourists learn how to hike safely and better along, plan parts of their trips, and explain my research to the many curious tourists unfamiliar to the National Trail and ecotourism.

One very exciting experience I was able to do with participant observation was to participate on blazing a new trail in Mitzpe Ramon thanks to previously meeting with personnel T-C. In order to create a new trail there are many steps that must be taken. First someone must identify an area with potential for hikers wanting to go into which was done by the Society For Protection of Nature in Israel. Once that was done I joined a team of T-C and two other Israelis
that had a 1 year contract with SPNI for blazing trails in Israel. Since the area we were going to be marked was on the Har Negev Nature Reserve, a park ranger was required to come with us. It is also very interesting to note that the start and end of the trail was just on the other side of a freeway with IDF soldiers using it as a firing zone. This however, is very typical in the area and the officer training academy located right in the area also.

I think it is very important to live, experience, and participate in ecotourism activities an area to better understand my research and hiker’s perceptions. Participant observation has been seen to benefit research and understanding by many with similar subjects in looking at sustainability such as Lew 2004 and Ryan 1995). Otherwise I wouldn’t experience certain events such as the Shabbat rush at grocery store, which hikers/tourists did not always realize would occur and that everything would close for 24 hours.

**Literature Review**

Overall, literature on tourism has been examined by a number of different disciplines from academics such as anthropologist, sociologist, economist, geographers and more. My research looks at tourism focusing from a geographic perspective in order to best answer my research question. Many are starting to look at ecotourism as the way to go within the tourism industry as it provides much opportunity to have a positive impact on an area whether it is from community based ecotourism or new developments. However, this is not always a positive impact and there are many issues that come along with it. This is why it is important that we also understand the stakeholder’s views on ecotourism which have been left out in much literature. Lastly it is important to understand the basis of trail literature as many tourism geographers have not yet examined and the problems that come with trying to make trails more sustainable.

**Ecotourism**

**Ecotourism Definitions**

Ecotourism is the fastest growing sector of tourism which is currently one of the largest industries (Boniface 1994, Cater, 1994, Bjork 2000). Eco itself stems out of the world ecology
while tour mean circle or movement and with the suffix of ism gives it an action to create ecotourism as an ecological movement (Lew 2004). Back in the 1980s people, started becoming more aware of the negative impacts and loss of habitat occurring and giving rise to ecotourism (Cosmescu 2007). This craze began when people started noticing negative impacts on tropical forest (Honey 1999b). Most recently at the start of the 21st century ecotourism gave rise to become a very hot topic issue within tourism as many started to look at the economic, social/cultural, and environmental aspects that came within development (Jaini 2012). With so many more people now being aware of the negative effects occurring in our environment, ecotourism has come to be the largest and fastest growing industry within tourism itself (Cater 1994). The first real combination between tourism and conservation of our environment was created into a real definition by Ceballos-Lascurain in 1987, (Fennel, 1999). He says that

“ecotourism is travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas”(Diamantis 1999).

Even with his definition being created, there has been no uniform definition agreed upon by everyone in the tourism industry but majority are along the lines of the ecological and socio cultural impacts of tourism. Ecotourism should have goals of creating employment, reducing leakages, and showing off traditional practices by cultures without turning it into commodification (Dufy2002). In addition, resource management is essential for ecotourism (Wright 1998). This is important since if we destroy all the resources in an area tourists will then cease to exist there with nothing to visit.

In 2002 the United Nations declared it to be the International Year of Ecotourism (IYE) so that they could create a new program and recommendations for how to go about a more sustainable development of ecotourism (Butcher 2006). This also led to the creation of the important Quebec Declaration on ecotourism which included a strong focus on incorporating sustainable development and a basic definition that many researchers such as Lew in A Companion to Tourism refer back to in their literature (Hall 1998, Lew 2004). Ecotourism must be looked at as something not just for helping out the current environment and local people of a site but also to preserve it for future generation to enjoy. Ecotourism has also been strongly
advocated by many major groups such as the World Conservation Union and the Ecotourism Society (Taylor 2003).

Ecotourism is looked upon as interdisciplinary, multi-disciplinary, and very widespread allowing for lots of research to be done. There however, is a debate occurring on whether it is an established academic discipline. Some geographers think it should be abandoned yet others believe it has a very well established presence in academia world with degrees being offered, publications made, and jobs created (Lew 2004). Ecotourism comprises many types of people and places that become involved with this industry. It can reach out to places such as reserves, national parks, tour groups, governments and many more (Cater 1994). The most common type of eco-tourists is generally older around ages 45-64 (Cater 1994). They are also usually very well educated and have more available time to travel. (Duffy 2002). The purpose of an eco-tourist vacation is one of an escape from the world and getting to see the unknown.

**Stakeholders in Ecotourism**

Stakeholders are very important within ecotourism literature. Stakeholders can range from being the site owners, government officially, tourists, local community, and various personnel of services in an area. If they do not properly understand how to develop a site it can have negative impacts on an area. McGahey (2012) discusses that they are also the ones responsible for understanding that sustainability of an area is key for its success. The managers and government officially typically have the most control however, on what type of development occurs in an area, leave the host community to be the most defenseless.

**Concepts**

**Sustainability**

Sustainability is however, the strongest concept within ecotourism. They go hand in hand with one another being ecotourism striving to be fully sustainable in all ways as its main goal. With the sustainability component of ecotourism the tourists are expected to be more aware of their actions that they have during their visit (Reichel 2008).

A majority of literature on ecotourism discusses the concept of sustainability within it at some point. Sustainability plays greatly into ecotourism itself as many goals of eco sites in
tourism are 1. To have sustainable positive impacts on the host environment and its people. 2. Be economically feasible for the area (Akama 2007 and Jaini 2012). Without proper implementation of sustainability, a possible loss of a beautiful environment, unique culture, and or loss of money can occur within the area (Collins-Kreiner 2010). With the sustainability component of ecotourism the tourists are expected to be more aware of their actions that they have during their visit (Reichel 2006).

**Development**

Many have used ecotourism development also as a way to decolonize an area such as in Cambodia. Ecotourism can allow local communities to regain their own culture back while still letting tourists learn more about them (Walter 2012). When planning proper development in ecotourism there are many stakeholders who should work together and understand what everyone needs. For instance if a government takes over and develops on a site there is the possibility that the may completely ignore that the area may be the local peoples main resource for medicine or the land they use to feed local cattle, then the site is not sustainable (Honey 1999a and Honey 1999b). Development should also help improve infrastructure of the area which could also lead to a better quality of life (Timur 2009 and Long 2012) In addition, if the local people are not pleased with the development occurring locally they can have negative impacts on the tourism simply just by making the area uncomfortable for tourists or even by not spreading the word of mouth to gain new visitor (Akama 2007and Long 2012).

Integrated development within ecotourism, which combine’s keeping some areas in a natural state and development in other areas is also starting to occur throughout ecotourism literature (Reichel 2008). By doing this approach, tourism personnel gain a broader type of tourists to an area such as in the Negev region of Israel then just extreme hikers that would rather be secluded (Tchetchik 2006 and Reichel 2008).

**Community Based Ecotourism**

Community based ecotourism has started to be very popular within the industry. At various ecotourism sites it can be seen that with a positive interaction between locals and tourists a stronger will to protect an environment can be created (Walter 2012). In Belize the Cockscomb Basin Jaguar Preserve became the first community ecotourism site which aimed to help educate
locals on how to conserve the local environment and become a future model for other sanctuaries (Duffy 2002). In Thailand and Cambodia community based ecotourism projects have been created to help local communities protect their culture and beautiful environment that they are locate in (Walter 2012). Local people at ecotourism sites are also able to create their own homestays that can help keep out large foreign hotels from coming in destroying the scenery, and creating leakages in the area (Duffy2002). The sustainability of a community is very important when it comes to ecotourism development. Precious resources in the area must be heavily considered when planning so that they are not destroyed but also protected in a way for future generations to enjoy.

By implementing ecotourism to an area appearance can be improved. This can be very helpful for areas with water shortages such as in Israel, or areas that are noticing a loss in the resources found in their ecology. In addition, areas that were once places of migration, watering holes, and tourism such as the Hula Valley in Agmon Lake, Israel, can be re-established with ecotourism projects that work together with all of the local people and look at how to best restore the ecology of the area (Collins-Kreiner 2010).

**Issues within Ecotourism**

Many issues come about with ecotourism. First, there is no universal standard to what ecotourism is. This causes issues for how permits should be given and made for people and sites. In addition, some countries have very few limits to what is considered ecotourism allowing for possible more destruction. Many companies see ecotourism as an opportunity to grab tourist on the eco or green bandwagon. They find by putting eco or green in front of advertisements for travel such as Eco travel or Eco tour as a way to boost up their sales (Cater 1994). These companies may have the intention of being good for the environment but infract have negative impacts if not going about everything in a correct way.

When implementing ecotourism into an area, there is a large need to incorporate the local people as decisions of the development that will be on their land (Cater 1994). This makes it so there is no bias concept or in some areas of the world a possible urban bias. Honesty must be used when having these talks so the local people re not betrayed or even kicked out of their own homes and land, making the effort for ecotourism in the area a failed plan. However, this is not
always the case and the locals/host and the tourist organization may have way different extremes in ideas for development.

Another issue is that in how to preserve resources correctly. Ecotourism is a resource based industry meaning if a tourism group or people use up the resources, then there becomes less possibility and openings for ecotourism. Eventually, if we destroy everything and use up all resources then ecotourism will cease to exist and tourist will be deprived of the possibility of visiting a certain environment. This is why the many people and organizations involved in ecotourism need to have the present and future of an area at mind and interest when looking into anything sustainable in ecotourism.

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Trails

There is some literature within tourism and Geography about trails and, especially how we should define them. Similarly to ecotourism there are various definitions of what a trail is. Some look it as a “path used for nonmotorized travel (Eyeler et al 2008 and Mundet et al 2010). However, this does not coincide fully with the Israel National Trail as it has paths specifically for Jeeps.

Trails are becoming quite popular within tourism and can be looked at as a way to help out an area’s economy, culture, and resources (Vas 2013). However, it was not until the mid-1990s when “trail tourism increased exponentially” (Maxwell 2012). This can be seen as trails such as the Inca Trail or Camino De Santiago having not just pilgrims want to come and hike but new explorers.

A major problem within trails and their development is that many were not created by professional tourism planners (Vas 2013). This is, especially true when looking at my study of the Israel National Trail. This can be a major problem as them these developers do not have not
much of a background or understanding on Sustainable Development (Vas 2012). This with overuse of trails cause is quite harmful to an area even causing degradation (Randall 2008). Some Trails have started to create policies that combat the problems such as the 2000 Inca trail which was the first major policy put in play (Maxwell 2012)

**Conclusion**

By looking at how the Israel National Trail and Jesus Trail meets ecotourism criteria from the Lower Galilee and Negev region I add onto literature on ecotourism and geography. Stakeholders, trails and the many issues that come with making sustainable trails are also added onto within literature. Currently there is very little literature on the Israel National Trail, Lower Galilee Region, and Mitzpe Ramon. In addition, there is little literature on backpacking trails and how they are sustainable or not. By conducting a variety of interviews of personnel, surveys of hikers, and participant observation on the trail, Yarok Az, and the Green Backpackers I am able to better understand how to answer my research question.
Chapter 4

Environmental perceptions and practices of Ecotourism along Israel’s Trails

Introduction

Tourists do not typically perceive Israel as an outdoors destination. However, the country has a beautiful landscape full of trails and a large range of environmental features from Mountains to Macktesh, some parts which can be quite harsh and others rather relaxing. Israel’s trails go through these features and more including streams along the beautiful Mediterranean Sea. In this section is the discussion of how the hikers and personnel along trails in Israel practice and address ecotourism, focusing on the environmental aspect of sustainability. Many Stakeholders see the potential for greener tourism and trails in Israel. However, my results show that hikers do not typically care to be more sustainable, and a change in management and ability for hikers to gather water must occur first. This will be done by looking at how the ecology and landscape of the Jesus Trail and Israel National Trail in the Galilee region and in Mitzpe Ramon transform them. By observing and conducting my various methods, one is able to better understand what is being done to protect the beauty of Israel and how the Trails in Israel are being impacted along with how stakeholders view all of this. In this chapter I will look at the general perceptions of ecotourism in Israel, the Israel national Trail, case study site Mitzpe Ramon, the Jesus Trail, and lastly, my second case study site of Illaniya.

Personnel Perceptions of Ecotourism and the Environment in Israel

Demand for Ecotourism in Israel

A major question with ecotourism and sustainability of the trails in Israel is whether or not stakeholders have a demand for it, and if yes, what are their actions and practices of sustainability along the trails. Currently there is only one ecotourism organization in Israel called Ecotourism Israel. However, there is the ILH Hostel Association that focuses mainly on helping independent travelers visiting Israel and is comprised of 30 hostels in which many try to be sustainable (Israel Hostels, 2014 & Personnel C-D). There is also the Society for Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI), but even for them ecotourism was at first not their main goal, however, they now focus on trying to help out Israel and her environment as much as possible and also are in charge for blazing all of the trails (Personnel TC-G).
Several personnel believe that currently nobody wants sustainable trails and that the Minister of Tourism is not for ecotourism in Israel. Personnel discussed that majority of the hikers are not looking for sustainability along the trails but just adventure. The older groups that hike want to come back to places that are nice to sleep and have hot showers. They believe that to have green tourism in Israel, there needs to be cheaper options for lodging and more dorms. Generally, personnel see the potential for Israel to become more sustainable and for ecotourism to grow in the country with so many beautiful beaches and parks. Ecotourism can also create opportunities for various communities to come and work together, and also become educated on it to help preserve a beautiful country. However, several believe with creating more ecotourism in Israel that it’s all about how you sell it.

Even without stakeholders seeing much of a demand for ecotourism in Israel, many do believe that ecotourism is still an important subject that should be addressed and incorporated into activities such as tours. Personnel such as TG-L believe that the demand for ecotourism comes mainly from international tourists. Overall, Personnel believe it is important to inform people about what Israel is doing to help the environment and how they conserve renewable resources.

**Problems with Sustainability in Israel**

There are problems with sustainability in Israel, such as who benefits from it. The land authority looks at property to be useless and then sells it to a village. This becomes a problem and the property may not be attractive and then nobody goes there and nobody then benefits from it. In fact, when discussing the overall concept I learned that many personnel have stopped using ecotourism and started using sustainability after better understanding the principles. This can be one of the many effects of ecotourism being such a broad definition. Personnel BW-B has a problem with the concept of ecotourism in Israel. He tells me that “this isn’t Africa we don’t need ecotourism and we don’t need to change tourism for cultures”.

Many also discuss how SPNI, who is the main organization for trails, are just in it as marketing rig and not there to really help the environment or local people. However, originally ecotourism was not a main goal of SPNI, as personnel TC-G discussed with me, which is quite odd as the Society for Protection of Nature in Israel is stated in the name. However, they
discussed that the trail itself has every aspect of sustainability and ecotourism in their planning and has a power to affect society. The SPNI allows the INT to help local places get cleaned up more and maintained better. It has also allowed people to visit places they may not necessarily ever go to such as the Galilee area. This also may make hikers more aware of environmental and social problems the region is facing. Hikers walking along can see the effect of construction and garbage being thrown everywhere that changes the scenery in the area. “The connection between hikers and local people is not something you can just measure” (Personnel TC-G).

With looking at how sustainable the INT is, personnel B-I believes that in general the trail is sustainable. He discussed how everything about the trail was unique from the “religious sites along it, the Negev desert, along with how the trail can be hiked in the winter unlike most others in the Northern hemisphere” (Personnel B-I). Other personnel find the INT to be less about the environment and more about society and how it affects them. In addition, the INT has helped make people more aware of environmental problems as they come face to face with them which is an important component of sustainability.

When looking at how to make the trail more sustainable Personnel B-I believes we need to focus on all of those components. Several personnel believe that the best way, however, to help protect the desert environment is to just do nothing and leave it alone. With that it doesn’t matter if you recycle, use solar panels, or eat organic, it only really matters that a site makes money without being subsidized by the government or a NGO. The site should then invest the money back into the local community, use existing infrastructure, and give free information about sustainability.

**Trails in Israel**

**Trail Blazing**

This summer I was able to participate in a part of trail blazing for a new trail in the Har Negev Nature Reserve in Mitzpe Ramon. It is important to understand how the trails are maintained in Israel so that we better understand if there is damage done while maintaining them, what can be improved upon, and how it may affect an area. For instance, if it is not maintained well enough a section may become too confusing and hikers may skip over it which then can have a chain reaction of events and eventually lead to less money coming into that area. This is a
very interesting process that may take awhile and involves hard work. Trail Blazing is done by
the SPNI in Israel, in which I worked with Personnel TC-G, two yearlong contract workers ages
27 and 28, and a National Park Ranger due to the location of the trail being in the National Park.
It is interesting to note that when we went to blaze the new trail, the park ranger took quite a
while to show up. In fact we waited so long that the group was just going to go into the park
themselves. Personnel TC-G says this happens sometimes and they just go into a park without a
Ranger. It would be curious to know if this happens quite often or just in Mitzpe and if damage
has ever been caused as the Ranger really did not do anything while we were there.

Once in the area where the new trail is going to be, caution tape is placed on large
markers such as trees or heavy rocks along where it will go as another collects the GPS points to
upload. If there is nothing to be used for marking, large rocks are carried in, placed down, and
dug in enough so that they can’t be moved easily. The following day, a team comes back in to
paint markers about every 10 meters. This distance is chosen so that hikers can easily see the
next marker on a trail. This can be a very hard and tiring process. Once the trail is finished being
marked, it can be up to 4 years until it is put on a map that people are able to purchase, as that is
how often SPNI puts out new maps. However, trails themselves are re marked every 3 years or
sooner if people put in a notice about a disappearing marker.

Types of Trails

There are several types of trails hikers can do in Israel, including hiking, biking, and Jeep
trails. The Israel National Trail has various sections for which people may bike. However, in
May 2013 the Israel National Bike Trail was inaugurated but has only been completed in certain
areas including Mitzpe Ramon. Personnel TG-F claims that the Jeeps are the most destructive to
the area but are also the best when it comes to receiving water and throwing away trash for
hikers on long journeys. They also can be too pricey for the independent traveler. Overall, it
seems hiking is the most sustainable way to do the trails.

National Parks:

There are many National parks along the INT and Jesus Trail that hikers will pass
through. At the parks, the Israel Nature and Parks Authority becomes in charge of the area
(Personnel NP-E). Several personnel found this to be an issue, as many hikers want to pass for
free because they are not stopping to look around or anything, yet are being charged at many of the parks. They found this to be a problem, as then the hikers walk around the parks such as Mt. Arbel in the Galilee and miss their beauty and unique structure. Also, many of the hikers are coming out of the Israel Defense Force and are very poor which makes them unable to pay the sometimes high price for entrance.

There was also a belief by personnel that no ecotourism is being done at the parks. They mainly focus on dealing with the animals and plants with little focus on the tourists. However, some such as Personnel E-K believes that things will be changing soon with the National Parks. Less money will be given out by the government, and the parks will have to become more touristic to earn money. The Negev Region where my Case study of Mitzpe Ramon takes place actually holds about 20% of Israel’s National Parks in which many INT hikers pass through (Bar 2012).

While conducting my research I was able to visit and observe several of the National Parks along and near the INT in the Negev Region. Due to the summer weather, I was not able to see as many hikers as typical otherwise. The trails seemed to be moderately clean and well-marked throughout. One exception would be minor confusion due to overgrown bamboo covering trail markers in Ein Akev. Another problem I was able to identify was deterioration at the Ammonites Wall in Mitzpe Ramon which could be due to hikers taking ancient fossils out for themselves. Many of these sites are located along or near the main highway which can allow for hikers needing a break or those doing a day hike of the INT to hitchhike part way as it is common and typically safe to do so in Israel. Those doing sections of the trip throughout a year or so may however come to face problems with lack of accessibility as many of these places are isolated and difficult to find, particularly if one does not own a car. This is especially true for Timna National Park located not far from Eilat. Lastly the INT goes near many other National Parks in the Negev such as Avdat seen as (number 60) in Figure 4.1, any of the Biblical Tels UNESCO sites (number 53), and the Ramon Visitor Centre and Bio Ramon located in Mitzpe Ramon (number 61).
Environmental Perceptions: Case Study Israel National Trail

Environmental Issues

There are many environmental issues along the two trails, such as a loss of Sand Dunes due to erosions and other problems along the INT. Many of these issues can be seen along the beaches in places, such as Netanya where the INT goes right through. Many 4 wheel trucks are coming through and ruing the area along with a waste dump being located next to the sea. In addition, the INT faces problems beyond water, construction, and trash. Several personnel
believe that the INT hikers suffer from where to get food and how to cook it. Some take matters into their own hands to help this problem out such as Personnel B-O and take time to show the hikers how to properly get food and make good meals which will keep them energized.

Many of these problems come from a lack of environmental education in Israel. Environmental education is looked at by many to be very important part of “worldwide educational movement and a significant part of international environmental policy (Bhanadari and Abe 2002, Fiend and Greenhall, Gough 2001) quoted in (Gilberts 2003). Overall, the personnel believed that Education of the environment should be more important for the local people along places of the INT so they better understand how their effects of construction and garbage being thrown everywhere changes the local scenery. The personnel found it is more important for the locals, as they can have a much stronger impact than just day hikers coming through. On the other hand Personnel N-J does not believe the environmental problems come necessarily from the local citizens but with the government wanting to build more roads, graveyards, and gas stations along the INT destroying the environment in the process.

However, there is a master plan for recycling to be connected through settlements for recycling routes. Also they are trying to promote bettering the beaches and possibly creating a marine reserve, but there is no good infrastructure and lots of bureaucracy (Personnel N-J).

Water issues in the South

Water is quite an issue quite an issue in the Negev Region of Israel where my case site of Mitzpe Ramon is located. Here there is an extreme absence of water which makes it quite a difficult hike in areas along the INT. This problem with water does not seem to exist anywhere else in the world. Many Israelis do not even complete all sections in the Negev due to this problem (Personnel TG-F). As a worker at SPNI Personnel TC-G discussed with me that not much was being done about the water issue yet. He believes that there should be a much more basic change of managing the trail first. There are two main ways of getting water when in the Negev desert: by water cache or by Jeep. Many, however, do not know how to work these logistics or have the money for them.

Water Caching is one of two main ways to get water when hiking through the Negev Desert. This is when one either buries a pack of water a specific way in advance or has someone
else put it in a spot before the hiker arrives. However, according to Personnel B-I’s book there are problems with stealing in certain areas or hikers forgetting where they buried their water. Personnel NP-E from the National Park Service used to place water caches for people but eventually had to stop due to how much responsibility it was. “The thing is if something goes wrong or something comes up such as for work and you are not able to place the water then the hiker is screwed” (Personnel NP-E). Other personnel discussed with me how there was once a guy who used to put water bottles in a caching area down south for hikers to have. However, the spot started becoming a trash point as people assumed whoever was leaving them water would pick up their trash. This then caused the National Park service to step in and force him to stop. The park service does not place water along paths according to Personnel NP-E. Personnel B-I author of INT guide book discussed with me that by late 2014 there will be water faucets along the INT, even in the desert, but for now hikers must do water caching to survive. However, none of the other stakeholders interviewed mentioned anything about new water faucets in the works.

The other option for obtaining water in the Negev desert along the INT is by hiring a Jeep to come and bring the water. This however, can be too expensive, especially for the lone hiker or those just getting out of the IDF. The Jeeps are currently also only owned by private groups but this could be changed to be state managed, especially in the south. This would require a large effort and a lot of money do such a thing. In addition, Jeeps can have negative impacts on the environment which they must drive through. Overall, there personnel believe that logistical support for water would make not just the INT more popular but also other trails throughout Israel.

For those just visiting the South for a short period of time and would like to hike a small section of the INT, water is not as much of an issue. Hikers are able to fill up their bottles before heading out. However, it is important that they take enough water to sustain them for their entire hike there and their way of returning, as there are no spouts or so to fill up along the way. In order to carry enough water Hikers must have some sort of way for taking the water along with them either a type of bag and or large enough water bottles. This can be difficult if they have not invested in a large enough camel bag. Over at the Green Backpackers, Personnel B-H suggest that guest without enough water bottles for hikes just reach in and take some from the local recycling bin, so they don’t have to waste more water bottles.
With sustainable development and ecotourism, resources such as water can be better preserved which can benefit Israel tremendously. Overall, it seems there is a want for easier ways to gain access to water in the South and that hikers may be less informed about how reusing water bottles can benefit the environment.

**Firing Zones**

One unique thing about the Israel National Trail is that in the Negev Desert it passes through many firing zones by Israel Defense Force (IDF). This has actually caused the trail to change every so often which is why it is of most importance for hikers to have updated maps and be aware of any changes during weekdays. There are phone numbers in that one needs to call when crossing through on weekdays; however, these may be hard to find, especially for those unfamiliar with the need to do so and those that don’t speak Hebrew. Many do not end up calling, but if one is hiking with a tour, the guide must legally call and let the IDF know. Personnel B-H over at the Green Backpackers sees the IDF being a positive note in the area, as it preserves a part of the area instead of building more towns and such. In addition, the IDF tends to use one area as long as they can, allowing for less destruction to be done. Overall, many hikers not from Israel seemed to be quite shocked at being able to be so close to a firing zone, but it did not defer them away from their hike.

**Issues with Trash in the South**

There is a problem with trash along Israel’s trails, particularly in my case site of Mitzpe Ramon. When hiking along the INT in this region, there are not many trash cans throughout the trail as it goes through very isolated areas. This becomes a problem when hikers do not want to carry their trash all the way until their next destination, especially if it smells. This can be another positive impact for hiring a Jeep to bring hikers water as they can also come and collect trash. In addition, Personnel TG-F pointed out that it is particularly important for hikers to not throw food out along the trail pathways as it may attract more animals. This can be dangerous because there are several poisonous snakes in the area and can also harm animal’s diets.

Many of the stakeholders interviewed agreed that trash was a problem in the south of Israel along the INT and in Mitzpe (Personnel NP-E, TG-F, TC-G, & B-H). Personnel NP-E discussed that National Park Rangers are in charge of collecting the trash found along the trails.
However, they do not reach all parts, particularly if it is not considered a nature reserve or part of their jurisdiction. Other personnel believe that hikers should just take their garbage with them to the next disposal site and leave no trace. However, he failed to mention what to do when the next disposal site may be far away and hikers do not want to carry so much garbage, especially if it is food that may attract animals or smell. It was also suggested that when it comes to this problem hiring a Jeep may be the best solution currently as when they come to bring water they can also dispose of any trash they may have. However, Personnel TG-F, a tour guide says that the trash from down south comes from the hikers leaving campgrounds, some from Bedouin camps, “while up north it is definitely from the Arabs.”

While conducting my research in Mitzpe Ramon I was able to meet with Personnel B-N, a local Bedouin. Typically, Bedouins in Israel are known for not being sustainable and leading too much of the trash in Israel. In fact, many Bedouin towns are actually illegal according to local National Parks workers. This past summer of 2013 the government was planning new actions on how to combat this issue, such as moving the Bedouins to new locations, even if it may be controversial (Kestler-D'Amours, 2013). However, Personnel B-N defies the Bedouin stereotype in Israel, with many believing that they steal and are nomadic still. He has actually taken charge of trying to teach the people in his town about how to properly dispose of trash. This nevertheless did not work as it is not typically part of their culture. When Personnel B-N gave each family garbage can to use he came back to everyone having filled them with grains and flour instead. Personnel B-N still would like to try and teach his village more and also opened up an ecotourism farm/site there. He hopes to teach not just his local village but all that come by. Unfortunately the village is a bit out of the way from most things and just slightly out of the way from the INT so it may be hard to attract visitors. However, this is a very important step for Bedouins; defying their stereotype and teaching more people of the Negev about ecotourism.

Overall, in the South it was easy to see the large amounts of trash especially in Mitzpe Ramon. Majority of the hikers I met with or observed had comments about how they did not realize how there could be so much and how little was being done about it by the city council.
Case Study Mitzpe Ramon

For my research along the INT, I focused a case study on Mitzpe Ramon down South, specifically at the Green Backpackers Hostel. With sustainability in mind over at the Green Backpackers, it is very important to Personnel TG-F and B-H to protect the environment and area of Mitzpe Ramon. Mitzpe Ramon is a relatively small town whose tourism has been developing more and more over the years. In addition, “the notion of desert areas as suitable for nature-based tourism has been implemented in the Israeli arid region of the Negev for decades” (Reichel et al, 2008).

Stakeholder’s perceptions on Sustainability in Mitzpe Ramon

Personnel TG-F discussed with me that, “you can try to be as green as you want but things happen, guests don’t want to deal with bugs in the place, so you end up having to kill them.” The Green Backpackers among many other places in Mitzpe Ramon do not have any solar panels. This is important to note as it is a major trend in sustainability and was quite shocking to see during my observations. Personnel TG-F explained that he does not necessarily believe in solar panels. This is because eventually they will have to be thrown away creating more waste anyways. They can also be quite pricey and as they are a newer hostel, there is not enough money to pay for them quite yet. Personnel B-H also discussed with me the want for wind turbines in windy Mitzpe Ramon but they were also too expensive. This is a bit ridiculous as a place like Mitzpe which is windier than most should be able to use them, “but don’t put them in because they are idiots. The windmills should be on an abandoned air strip, but many argue against this as it would affect bird migration” (Personnel B-H).

Another way those at the Green Backpackers would like to eventually make the hostel more sustainable is by covering the place in mud to provide insulation, especially during the cold winter. This was one of the first things B-H considered as many places in Israel are doing Mud buildings but then again B-H discussed with me that if everyone did mud buildings ‘then we may eventually run out” (Personnel B-H). While exploring the Negev Region I observed how mud buildings are becoming quite common in Israel. Places known for their sustainability such as nearby Kibbutz Lotan have covered their dorms and everything else with mud. In Mitzpe Ramon
specifically they have a mud playground which has actually started breaking apart and collected a large amount of trash.

**Trash in Mitzpe Ramon**

Over at the Green Backpackers Hostel they have identified the trash in Mitzpe being a major problem. However, the town is extremely windy which does not help out the trash situation as it is thrown everywhere constantly. The personnel discussed that much of the problem stems from once again lack of environmental education and many of the resident’s just throw their trash right out their windows. This is something I observed during my stay there. In addition, B-H believes that the city council is a major reason for so much trash as they don’t clean up or spend money on resources such as garbage cans or good education. In addition, the people they bring into Mitzpe are typically on welfare with some refugees and tend to throw boxes straight out the windows. This has led the Hostel owners to try and clean up parts of town with their volunteer staff to make it look more of a desirable place to stay. This has included painting stairwells that are shared with local residents in a way for their many children to enjoy. However, many of the residents do not show respect to their hard work and tend to scribble along the walls, leading to less of an effort of cleaning done by the hostel.

**Other Lodging in Mitzpe**

There are many other places in Mitzpe Ramon that try to be environmentally friendly. There is the Be’erot campsite also located near the Macktesh which is looked upon as being sustainable by many personnel. The hikers are able to get food and water there which may be difficult when travelling through the Negev region. Silent arrow and the Alpaca farm also allow hikers and guest to stay in tents further out of town. Martin and Roni’s tent and guesthouse have a small garden with vegetables for their guest to use in which they then also teach hikers how to cook better in the desert. When interviewing them they discussed how what hikers eat is important so that they have strength to keep going. It was also suggested that a hiker may go to the grocery store in town and buy a frozen chicken which they would then put on their back and cook at their next stop, “it keeps them cool and they have a good meal” (Personnel B-O). Adama is another place in town located in the old industrial area and is also a National Trail angel. Adama actually translates to Earth in English and has such a relaxing feel to the place. There one
can find a larger garden out back full of vegetables in which grey water is used to water them. In addition, they have chickens for eggs and separate their garbage (Personnel B-Q).

**Environmental Issues in Mitzpe Ramon**

Currently there are other environmental issues occurring in Mitzpe Ramon that can affect how sustainable it is. Recently houses have started being built near Camel Hill. This may not be the best as there is a lot of wind there and many view they should not be so close to the Macktesh, including Personnel TG-F and B-H. In addition, many locals do not understand why they should not feed the many roaming Ibex in the town. This leads to Ibex digging through garbage and coming very close to houses and people to try and get more food, much of what they should not be eating.

In Mitzpe Ramon there is also a visitors center that has a small section to educate visitors on how Macktesh Ramon was formed and its geology and other environmental aspects. Nearby is also Bio Ramon that is supposed to show off plants and animals that may be found in the region. However, even though one ticket allows visitors to get into both places, many fail to visit these centers, especially hikers (Personnel NP-E). This does not allow them to get more educated on the environment they are visiting which leads to less purposeful ecotourism.

**Introduction to the North**

The Galilee Region where the INT and Jesus Trail pass through is comprised of a relatively green landscape with streams, Galilee Sea and the Jordan River. This is quite the opposite of the Negev Region. In addition, there are many mountains such as Mt. Tabor, Mt. Arbel and the Golan heights where one can view into neighboring Syria and Lebanon and also visit their National Parks. This is not one of the wealthier regions of Israel, and due to the landscape many live in small villages. The region also has major cities such as Nazareth and Tiberius which are home to many religious sites and an overall beautiful landscape. This is an important region to be well preserved as it has fertile land and access to water for future generations to enjoy.
Introduction to the Jesus Trail

When reading through the guide book or just any forum online on the Jesus Trail they discuss how it was built with sustainability in mind, and how the environment should be cared for based on the “leave no trace behind approach,” which is exactly as it sounds (Personnel C-D). This past summer I was able to speak with co-creator Personnel C-D about the Jesus Trail itself. Personnel C-D explained to me how the trail uses dirt roads and goat paths so that it did not damage any nature or forest with development as the Jesus trail only uses existing infrastructure. This also allows hikers to experience more so the original landscape and take in the environment on a more personnel level. In addition, as parts of the sustainable outlook hikers are asked to “respect shortages” is the area such as water or electricity that may limit their use of them (Village to Village, 2013).

Navigation Issues

Being able to navigate a trail is very important. In addition, it is of most importance that trails be well marked for hikers to navigate easily. If hikers can’t navigate a trail easily this information will be passed onto other potential hikers and may affect if they choose to do the trek or not. If majority of hikers are having serious difficulty navigating then there is less of a prospect for an increase in tourists hiking. This can be detrimental to the environment as then hikers will not become aware of possible occurrences along an area, such as trash, which can then not be taken care of. Many hikers have difficulty navigating the Jesus Trail and the INT. As seen below in Figure 5, my results from my surveys showed that majority of hikers had difficulty navigating the Jesus Trail as for the INT this was the opposite result. This may be due to poor markings, their lack of ability to read maps, construction or other reasons. Majority of the hikers had the Jesus Trail guide book with them, but not all have updated changes due to construction. One guest that came through from Poland actually did not have anything, and was hoping to just follow the markers. Overall, as seen in Figure 4.1 42% of those surveyed wanted better markers on the trails to help with navigation.
Table: 4.1 Survey Results on Hiker Navigation

Difficulty to navigate: Yes INT: 10%, No INT: 90%, Yes Jesus: 73%, No Jesus: 27%
Overall want for better trail markers: Yes 24%

Currently along the Jesus Trail there is major construction at the Golani Junction, just outside of Illaniya, which causes many to have difficulty navigating their way along the Jesus Trail. SPNI who is in charge of making sure trails are well marked, typically re-does markers about every three years due to wear and tear from the environment. If they are informed of a problem along a trail earlier they are supposed to come and fix them. However, Personnel BW-B believes that specifically in the Galilee area the Arab towns have been moving markers to get hikers to come into their towns more. In the case of the Jesus Trail volunteers at the Fauzi Azar are instructed to help Jesus Trail hikers begin their trip, as the starting landscape may be a bit difficult for some to navigate. Personnel B-O believes that many hikers in general, especially those not from Israel tend to not understand how to navigate tough landscapes in general and also do not understand how to read maps.

Types of Hikers along Jesus Trail

The hikers along the Jesus Trail were split into two main types of people; those that were hiking for religious purposes such as following the footsteps of Jesus, and those that were doing it for a fun hike in a part of Israel they were not familiar with. Majority of the hikers also tend to befriend others along the trail and continued travelling along together. This is also typical of many hikers along the INT who I talked with. By befriending other hikers it may help enhance ones experience of hiking and also allow one to not get as lost.

Issues of Trash up North

The biggest complaint heard from people along the Jesus Trail and INT was about how much trash it had. Personnel and co-creator of the Jesus Trail C-D discussed how this comes from the concept that the trail goes through the backyard of Israel. However, a lot of the trash comes from contractors and is industrial trash. Many Arab communities are really suffering as
they receive less government money (Part of them not serving in the IDF) (Personnel C-D). In addition, when you think about it, “When Jesus walked it was very dirty”, which is something to think about it as you are following his footsteps in this trail (Personnel C-D). Overall, trash is an ongoing issue in Israel even Mark Twain wrote about it in Innocents Abroad (C-D). The trails allow these issues to be exposed to the world as there are not equal rights to all citizens. Overall, many personnel believe that with people being exposed to the trash, than more improvements will occur, which he has already noted being done.

Israel itself does have garbage collectors and give warnings to towns that do not take care of their garbage. However, this does not seem to be enough. Environmental Education can be seen as the core of this problem, and is not included in schools curriculum (Jesus Trail 2013, Shaoul, 2010). More recently this created problems with the bush fires that occurred on Mt. Carmel that left several dead (Village to Village, 2013). There is also a problem with not all hikers understanding proper etiquette on how to discard their trash when doing a hike. Overall, trash was the biggest complaint heard from hikers along the trails. 90% of those surveyed made a comment about this, as seen in table 4.2 below

In the Northern Region of Israel, along the trails there are many Arabs including the largest Arab town in Israel, Nazareth (Raz, 2013). Throughout conducting my research I was told by many that the Arab towns were much dirtier and less pretty. Some personnel explained to me that in Arab towns they typically do not paint their houses, and keep them unfinished so that they do not have to pay a tax, which does not help to the scenery. However, you can notice a difference between Arab towns that have served in the IDF, as they receive more money for housing, such as the Druze Village outside MT. Arbel. I was informed that in Haifa even though it is very mixed city it is clean, because it is under Jewish management (personnel BW-B). Several personnel believe that there is a major effect on how a town looks based on the management type. Others personnel also believe that the future on the trash situation is not a bright one. Personnel BW-B claims that the “Arabs think as Middle Easterner do not know how to be democratic and the others think as Europeans, leaving the Galilee to look more like Jordan and Haifa looking more like Europe”. Some personnel blames the Arabs for all of the trash up north and believe they just throw it out their windows, so it becomes somebody else’s problem. Personnel also find that lots of trash adds up at the bottom of Mt. Tabor, which is not the best of
neighborhoods, but also there are parts of the Negev that do have problems with trash. Nazareth, an Arab town up North, was cleaned when the pope came to visit in 2009, but many see all the work they did going to waste I was told by both creators of the Jesus Trail (Personnel C-D and C-M).

The operators of the Jesus Trail understand that that the trash is a major problem along their trail. This has led them to sending out volunteers to clean up trash across it and participate in events such as “Clean up the World Day,” where they worked with school children along it (Village to Village, 2013). In the future they hope to provide more alternatives for recycling and inspire more people to reduce the amount of trash they need to dispose.

**Issues with Water up North**

Water in a major issue in Israel and many are talking about it. The Galilee region where the Jesus Trail and the INT passes through is able to have some access to water due to the Kinneret in the Galilee Sea and Jordan River, which has been disputed over by the surrounding countries. In the Galilee area personnel believe that Arab villages are more worried about water. This can be seen due to their financial situations as they do not necessarily receive all the same benefits it they do not serve in the army.

When exploring areas up North along the INT and Jesus Trail including Illaniya, where I focused my studies up north, I did see large piles of Trash. This was particularly true around Mt. Tabor. There I also witnessed two INT hikers that looked absolutely filthy and were throwing small pieces of trash aside while overlooking the great view from the top.

Throughout my summer while up North I noticed that many hikers did not use reusable water bottles. I approached this question to Personnel C-D who believes that “they just don’t care about that and just care that they trash them”. He discussed that many of the tourists look at the area as a third world country, meaning that the water is not safe to drink so they must buy it in bottles. However, this is not an issue in Israel and western tourists should be educated about this.

**Case Study Illaniya**

While hiking in the Galilee along the Jesus Trail one may come through the small Moshav of Illaniya. Here there are many sites to see from the religious, to the beautiful flowers
in local’s front yards along the streets. However, due to how the landscape has been preserved many do not notice the great sites Illaniya has to offer. The spring, Mikva and Synagogue have been marked by the Ministry of tourism with a little blue sign in Hebrew at each site. Yet, weeds and plants have grown over them so much it is almost impossible to see. In addition, collections of trash have piled up at the sites, with nobody caring to clean it up, or preserve the sites better. There is also an ancient olive Press buried away so much that many almost trip upon, along with menorah Cave, which is actual a bit more difficult to find and is on private land of a dentist in town (Personnel B-A). When visiting the sites in Illaniya the American tourists coming through the area seemed more nervous about going onto private land then the others. About 70% of hikers I talked with did not know of the sites within Illaniya. Many did not try and go back to find the sites as they spend their time not hiking just relaxing and hanging out by the pool. However, a large group of High School students from Canada did go out and find all of the sites after careful instructions from personnel at Yarok Az where they were staying.

**Yarok Az Issues**

While hiking along the Jesus Trail and in Moshav Illaniya, one can come and experience the organic goat farm of Yarok Az. This is one of the ecological places that can be seen popping up around Israel. Its name is actually a play on words meaning the green/ strong goat. Here hikers and visitors are just a 30 minute drive from major sites such as; the Galilee Sea, Mt. Arbel, and Golan Heights. There hikers can experience a place that focuses on sustainability, in a location outside of Israel’s periphery. The environment that one experiences while at Yarok Az is unique. With being located in a small Moshav there are also three IDF bases within the community. In addition, there is some agriculture to be seen, including nearby vineyards at a local boutique guest house, rolling green hills, and also apple orchards.

Yarok Az was designed with permaculture approach in mind, Personnel B-A even enjoys showing her volunteers short YouTube videos better explaining what permaculture actually is. The technique of Permaculture is important as it’s a part of ecological development in which the way a place is built and kept up helps out the environment which it is in. There they raise enough produce for the family to consume and also give back a lot to the community. Personnel B-A would like her place to become more eco-friendly over time and to see a bit more development.
in the area but still keeping some area protected. In addition, there is a compost toilet on the farm which very few guest ends up using and many noted as ecotourism in my surveys.

**Recycling at Yarok Az**

One way to become more sustainable is to recycle. This is a big part for Personnel B-A’s family at Yarok Az. She says that recycling in Israel is a big problem and would like to increase their amount next year. At Yarok Az everything is divided up into several categories including, paper and glass bottles which they can later return for a few shekels. It was quite common for the Europeans particularly to go and buy beer for the night after a long days hike. They were good about depositing their bottles into the recycling bins at Yarok Az about 90% of the time. However, for other materials such as paper there was not a specific bin for them so it ended up going into the trash instead of recycling. It is interesting though, throughout many of the towns along the Jesus trail, including Illaniya, one can see large baskets for people to deposit their water bottles into; some are even painted with pretty things such as flowers so they look better in the neighborhood.

**Standards Issues at Yarok Az**

With make a place sustainable comes some issues, especially when dealing with standards of living for tourists. Typically when tourists come to their lodging after a long day of hiking or if they are staying just for a relaxing night away, they come to expect a clean place of staying and eating. Personnel B-A at Yarok Az does not expect any high class tourists to stay with her as its no four star hotel. The structure of her lodging has actually caused them to lose out on some tourists to the nearby Kibbutz Lavi, which is a bit nicer. Personnel B-A is very good about making sure the area guest sleep is cleanly swept and with fresh sheets. She believes that it is most important that the guests are happy before anything else. Many of the guests were okay with the service they received here, as they were not paying much and really just needed a place to crash before their next leg of hiking. However, many did complain about the cleanliness of the kitchen due to the ant problems, mice, and also issues with getting ahold of the owners so they could checkout early, pay and leave. The service quality in Israel rural tourism sector has been an ongoing problem (Reichel 2006).
Air conditioning becomes a big question of sustainability when it comes to tourism. By having an air conditioner in lodging for guest, the place is not looked upon as best for the environment. Yarok Az however, implemented air conditioning into both eco domes, the inside kitchen used for special events, and the office. Personnel B-A says she realizes the negative factors an air conditioner may have, but in Israel, particularly, during the hot summer months it is viable and something she is willing to have to keep guest satisfaction high. The guests that stay in the Geo Domes where the air conditioning is located are quite thankful for it.

In the Galilee region at Yarok Az there has been the recent addition of a pool which is also not looked at as being sustainable, especially in a country with little freshwater. Personnel B-A says however, that it makes the guest happy which is most important. Later on she would like to catch rain water for the pool in which they can then use at the end of the season to water the trees.

Table 4.2. Environmental Questions asked in Surveys

Do you base your Lodging Type based on if it is eco-friendly or not: Yes: 17%, No: 83%

What was ecofriendly about sites you stayed at: Yarok Az: 13%, Gardens: 10%, Compost Toilet: 20%, Camping: 3%, Goats: 1%, Ways of Living: 2%, Solar Panels: 3%, Garbage Cans: 10%, compost piles: 15%, recycling: 15%, Kibbutzim: 5%, Farms: 2% Mud Huts: 1%

How did you do your laundry during the Hike: By Hand: 25%, Hostels/sinks: 18%, Stream 20%, don’t (Jesus Trail) 35%, Don’t' Change Socks 2%

Reusable Water bottle vs non reusable: Reusable, 43%, Non Reusable: 57%

How do you gather Water during your hike: Cache 23%, Rivers/treatment 2.6%, Taps up north 2.6% Logistics vehicle 2.5%, Fill at Lodging: 69%

How do you gather Food? : Shipped due to dietary reasons 1%, buy at lodging: 42%, buy in Advance: 19%, Buy at Shops/gas stations: 35%, Logistics vehicle: 3%

One of the best methods for understanding stakeholders perception on ecotourism is conducting participant observation. By doing so I was able to actively be involved with the guests that came and stayed at Yarok Az and also observe them from afar. The guests were split
into two main categories; being hikers from the Jesus Trail, and Israeli Families coming in for Shabbat. Each weekend Yarok Az has Israeli families coming from the center of the country who stay for Shabbat, which is very typical to do. The guest throw out their garbage, recycled, picked herbs, some vegetables out of the garden, and almost always invited people to join them whether it is for a meal or just a cup of coffee/tea. However, this was not the case when it came to large groups of high school kids coming to stay. When talking with the Israelis who stayed at Yarok Az, majority were very excited that someone from the USA would come to study their country. It was interesting however, that the Israelis did not know of the Jesus Trail which Yarok Az was located on, and when I spoke of the National Trail they only recognized it when I spoke to them in Hebrew saying Shvil Y’israel. This was particularly intriguing as they seemed to be people that enjoyed outdoorsy activities and such which may lead one to think they would be more familiar with the larger hikes in Israel and possibly have even hiked one of them.

Overall, Personnel believe that many people want to be sustainable, but are very cheap and can’t afford to do so. Surveys showed though that 17% of hikers had chosen their lodging based on if it was sustainable or not as seen in figure 4.2. Many had chosen based on price, location, positive reviews, and by reading the Lonely Planet in which many owned a copy of. However, several did discuss that they chose to come to Mitzpe Ramon in particular, as it was a destination isolated away from others where they could escape the real world and see something on the unbeaten path. This is similar to what ecotourism is defined as “responsible travel in which the visitor is aware and takes into account the effect of his or her actions on both the host culture and environment” Brouse, (Reichel et al 2009). There was a variety of ideas from hikers on how they viewed their sites to be ecofriendly which can be seen below in Figure 4.3. Items that were noted by the majority of hikers to be ecofriendly included compost toilets, recycling bins, and compost piles. My surveys also aimed to understand how sustainable hikers are along the trails including how they got food, water, laundry, and if they used a reusable water bottle or not as seen in Figure 4.3. In terms of how hikers did their laundry along the trail majority did it in some form of a sink with the exception of those hiking the Jesus Trail that did not do it at all. This can be seen as a result for it being a much smaller trail. As for getting their food majority bought it at local lodges or shops. This can help bring money into the area if it is a local shop and hikers also have more of a chance to buy local foods such as at one of the two markets held every week in Mitzpe Ramon. It is also important to look at how the hikers are carrying their water,
majority of which used non reusable bottles. This is something that sticks out as being non sustainable. Lastly, my surveys as showed below in figure 4.3 show how majority of hikers did fill up their water at lodging followed by having to cache it. However, this would mean that majority of those I surveyed did stay at lodging instead of illegal campgrounds in which my results may end up different.

**Conclusion**

Even though Israel is typically perceived as more of a religious tourism destination it has a beautiful wide ranging landscape with much to offer. Overall, ecotourism in Israel is not quite strong yet, especially when it comes to water and trash issues along her trails. Also, there is not a strong demand for ecotourism. However, with many becoming more aware of what is occurring there is a better chance that we can see change in the future. In addition, more and more stakeholders seem to recognize the need for sustainable tourism in Israel, yet it seems new management must take place first, or more entrepreneurs such as personnel C-D and C-M to arise. There also needs to be something done about the trash problem along both the INT and Jesus Trail. This could start from better educating locals and hikers on how to properly dispose of their garbage. Lastly, Israel needs to create a better way for hikers to gather water along their trip, especially when in the desert. This would make the trails more popular and also greener, which would help preserve the landscape, National Parks and all living things within it. The INT and Jesus Trail offer much beauty and unique environments that are important for us to protect for future generations to enjoy.
Chapter 5

Socio-Cultural Perceptions of Ecotourism along Israel’s Trails

Introduction

Israel is typically looked at as a place for religious/pilgrimage tourism with many people coming to visit places such as the Western Wall. However, the Israel National Trail and Jesus Trail were created to allow tourists to not only see religious sites, but also so areas that they may have not necessarily visited otherwise. This would lead many to think that these trails allow hikers to experience new cultures, but this is not always the case. In this section I discuss how the Israel National Trail and Jesus Trail affects various local communities and how the tourism personnel along with hikers view the socio-cultural aspects of ecotourism on the trails. Overall, the trails are slowly starting to help out small communities, more so in the north, and small communities in the south. However, there are issues of who is in control of the trails. This becomes a problem and is apparent when looking at the socio-cultural impacts the trails have on their regions and the different cultures within them. Community involvement is a large and important component of ecotourism as it’s looked at as “responsible travel that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people” (Comescu, page 2007). Community involvement can be very important in discussion of this topic as it’s “more likely to be environmentally sensitive than mass tourism” within terms of being sustainable (Timothy pg. 153 2002). Tourism development does heavily rely on the locals, and if they are not supporting it and have a negative attitude, the more likely an area will fail (Long, 2012). Once again this section will focus on the Galilee area in which the Jesus Trail and INT pass through along with the Negev Region focusing on Mitzpe Ramon where the INT goes through. I examine how the trail may better the locals’ lives or cause opposite impacts. This will be done by looking at globalization and government involvement; followed by a look at the INT, Mitzpe Ramon, Jesus Trail, and Illaniya. In addition, I discuss how the people of these communities view the trail and how it has, or has not helped preserve their culture.

Globalization along the trails
Effects of globalization can be seen throughout both the INT and Jesus Trail. When passing through places such as Cana on the Jesus Trail, you can see a NY Pizza and various Starbucks. When it comes to Mitzpe Ramon globalization has not hit as hard, as the residents prefer their local places. There one cannot go to the movies, chain clothing stores, or any chain restaurants other than Café Neto. However, the town is getting more and more of an affect from globalization with the opening of a Jazz club, a new marketing firm that just moved in summer 2013, and other places such as Chez Eugene, a local French Restaurant.

**Perceptions of personnel on Government Involvement**

Government involvement and their role in an area is something that must be looked at when discussing any type of tourism (Petric, 2007). Communities are not always able to develop tourism on their own, which can lead for the need of government involvement. However, in some cases like the Jesus Trail or INT, the government does not step up and help out as much as they could. This is why it is good that people such as Personnel C-D have taken charge and helped communities develop their tourism out along these trails, especially the Jesus Trail.

Many personnel view the government to not be helping tourism out, especially when it comes to ecotourism development. When the government does help out, they tend to focus on helping tourism out in just the religious sector. Many personnel believe the government is spending money on tourism in the wrong places, as when they just focus on pilgrims and big agents and hotel chains, the money tends to leave the local communities causing leakages. Some such as personnel B-P one of the owners of Abraham Hostel, believes that the government will soon recognize the need and reality for more hostels to be like Abrahams and have beds with lower prices (Gilad, 2012). Personnel B-P believes that overall the Israeli government should be involved in the tourism of Israel as “it’s an important tool for general growth of our economy”. He thinks that Israel and the government should model tourism off of countries such as New Zealand and Thailand, which have amazing landscapes and culture in them, and have been changed by the tourism industry. Overall, personnel B-P and others believe that the type of tourism the government should focus on is the sustainable tourism and independent type that allows tourists to see the “true Israel” (Personnel B-P). However, even with lots of signs for this new market appearing, this will take some time for the government to catch on as they are slow to understand and there is lots of bureaucracy (Personnel B-P).
Perceptions of personnel on government involvement along the Jesus Trail

Several personnel believe that the government should not be involved in tourism. This can be seen from conflicts in the past between personnel and the government. One major example of this conflict is with the government creating the Gospel trail after Personnel C-D and C-M created the Jesus trail. However, they believe that if the government is to get more involved, there should be a new insurance policy created for businesses in the periphery against geopolitical tension, as the main problem in Israeli tourism is that it’s quite unbalanced. The government should give money to places in the periphery not just after a crisis. For instance Personnel C-D discussed that every time there is an operation in Gaza the number of tourists drop and big cities recover much faster than those in the periphery. Others though such as personnel TG-L thinks there should be more government involvement when dealing with tourism in Israel.

Perceptions of personnel on government involvement in Mitzpe Ramon

The want for the government to be more involved seems mixed in the town of Mitzpe Ramon, where one of my Case Studies takes place. However, recently they have set aside several million dollars to re-do infrastructure in the Spice Route Quarter and the old industrial district (Personnel B-H). Issues with the local authorities have arisen, due to corruption occurring. In addition, “even with potential for tourism not everyone wants to see it grow or believes in tourism as the way for Mitzpe Ramon to grow” said Flora Shoshan of Mitzpe Ramon Local council (Rozenberg, 2012).

The town council of Mitzpe Ramon has been known to be very corrupt. Several personnel discussed with me that many bribes have occurred throughout the past ten years, and Mitzpe has been controlled by one council mainly. Opponents to them have found white powder and bullets in envelopes, along with more recently a lady was arrested right before hosting a meeting for a pot plant that can’t reproduce because of the sexuality of it found in her yard. Many look at the council for not allowing the tourism on the area to not reach its potential at all (Personnel B-H & TG-F).
INT Socio-Cultural Perceptions of Personnel

At Kibbutz Dan, which is the INT starting point in the North, personnel E-K discussed with me how they are now trying to develop more tourism along the trail there. Many have discussed different options on what to develop such; as cheap lodging, open more shops aimed at hikers, and there could even be a movie about the trail. This allows for more of a possibility for ecotourism to be implemented. It could even be something simple as making new artwork out of local stones or have a new way telling the story of the kibbutz.

On the outskirts of Tel Aviv along the beach where the INT passes through, recently blue flags have been put up to show how clean the beaches are. However, Personnel N-J discusses with me that there are still problems in this area along the trail as there is no good infrastructure and lots of bureaucracy. The locals would like to make the area more eco-friendly and have taken it upon themselves to start creating programs towards environmental leadership that may include projects such as planting flowers to make the area more beautiful for them and the hikers that come through.

INT Management

There are many issues with the trail, including who is responsible for it. Standards for keeping it are also quite different than that of US trail maintenance (Personnel TG-F). When the trail passes through nature it’s just another trail, but when it goes through a National Park the National Park service is in charge. The ministry of defense is in charge when the trail passes through firing zones and JNF when it goes through JNF forest. Town’s municipalities are in charge when it passes through them. As for marking it, putting in pegs and other maintenance the SPNI is the only company in charge of that. However, Personnel TC-G discussed with me that only SPNI is currently helping out with the trail.

Personnel E-K believes that the Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael also known as the KKL is planning on taking over the Israel National Trail in the near future, and will be developing more places such as lodging and places to eat. The KKL are already known for helping out with the reforestation of Israel, and is becoming one of Israel’s top green organizations (Keren Kayemeth
LeIsrael Jewish National Fund). This would be something interesting to see, as I was unable to get ahold of the KKL in Israel at all this summer having no phone calls returned and always getting notifications that they had a full inbox, so maybe they have a bit more work to do before taking over more of the trail.

Overall, it seems that the stakeholders view the trails in Israel as “sexy marketing tricks” (Personnel TG-F). Several personnel believe that the INT is no better or worse than any other trails in Israel, but it’s a good marketing trick to get a bit of Nationalism. Many including Personnel discussed that it is important to brand a trail when trying to attract more tourists. This is looked at one of the reasons why the INT is not doing as well, as it could because it is too broad to brand, while the Jesus Trail itself focuses heavily on one thing, following Jesus’s footsteps. However, the INT can be used as a place for team building and other activities for major companies which I will discuss more in Chapter six.

**Marketing along the INT**

While working in Mitzpe Ramon I met a backpacker from South Africa who was very interested in the INT, but nobody she talked with was able to give her much information about it. Over the next month of my research I actually came across many backpackers/hikers who faced the same problems. This can be seen as an outcome from there not being maps in English, and a lack of knowledge by locals. However, the people in Mitzpe Ramon generally seemed very unaware of many things, such as their lack in knowledge of street names. This was quite a problem for lost backpackers and tourists coming and trying to find their lodging.

**Group Hikers vs. Individual Hikers**

By looking at those who are hiking the INT opens up discussion on group hikers vs. individuals. Each group needs to be looked at separately because they have a different amount of resources. Generally groups have more money and can afford guides or jeeps that may carry water, food. Those in groups are typically mid-level income (Personnel TG-F). Individuals may have a problem with paying between 300-1200 shekels for a jeep to themselves which would be approximately $86-$345 US dollars (Personnel TG-F). Majority of the hikers though are coming straight out of their service in the IDF and can’t afford guides (Personnel TG-F).
Perceptions on Socio Cultural Aspects along the INT of Personnel

Many personnel I interviewed had actually hiked the trail and many viewed it as a great trail, but not a great tourism product. The trail itself is too large to brand, has no authorities, and no structure to help promote it. In addition, it is very difficult logistically and most westerners don’t have the time to hike all of it. Those who typically hike it are young Israelis that don’t have money, creating less of an economic influence over communities. They typically hike the INT as a form of Nationalism and as if they own the land, so they tend not to experience the nature and cultures that they pass through (Personnel C-D). This will not allow it to reach its potential, and will not help out communities.

Many personnel complained that the INT does not pass through enough different cultures. They believe that the trail has not been able to really help out local cultures, such as the Bedouins, as many may be afraid thanks to stereotypes and recent events of theft. Bedouin settlements in the Negev have typically not been treated well and many are not legal. This becomes a major political problem, especially in recent news as their settlements are not looked at as being ecological. In fact camels have actually been banned from the Macktesh in the Negev. Many personnel look at this as a way the government is trying to ban the Bedouins who heavily rely on camels, out of the Negev. This is one of the reasons the INT does not pass through many Bedouin settlements. Personnel B-N a local Bedouin in Mitzpe Ramon, discussed with me the current problem. He discussed how the stereotype of Bedouins just tossing trash wherever is a cultural thing. Many are typically un-educated and do not know better. However, for Personnel B-N’s settlement he has tried giving the families garbage cans and recycling bins for them to use; yet he discovered that the families had just filled them up with flour and grains as engrained in their culture. Personnel B- N however, does believe education is very important and sends his kids to get private tutoring in Mitzpe Ramon. He has also started an ecotourism site for his town hoping to attract some tourism while also educating the locals and visitors about their culture, and how to preserve the environment. However, his settlements location is in a hard area to reach and many tourists will not pass by. Personnel B-N also comes to the Green Backpackers hostel
where he offers a Bedouin experience of tea, stories, and allows guest to ask all sorts of questions as a way to better inform the world about the Bedouin culture.

Many of the hikers I spoke with admitted to not knowing much about religions and cultures that was not theirs. My survey results as seen below in Figure 6 show that 6% of hikers came specifically for religious purpose and 24% had motivation from religion to hike, which is mainly those along the Jesus Trail. One of the main goals from my surveys in this section was to see if hikers did experience a variety of cultures along the trails. This came from discussions with several stakeholders claiming that the INT only passes through Jewish areas. On the other hand, one of the main goals of the Jesus Trail is to pass through as many cultures and religions as possible. My results from the hikers did vary by which cultures they saw as seen below in table ranging from European tourists they encountered, to native to Israel Druze figure 5.1. Yet, there was not a high percentage for any of the cultures except for Europeans. This could be from hikers not interacting as much with locals but other hikers they meet along the way from places similar to them. Another result of these statistics could be from Hikers just being unaware of the cultures they pass through as they do not stop anywhere to learn more about them or interact with anyone else.

Table 5.1: Socio-Cultural Survey Question and results

Cultures experienced along trails not including Israelis: Jews: 16%, Muslims 9%, Christians: 9%, Druze 4%, Bedouins 9%, Arabs 16%, City People 4%, Americans 5%, Europeans 23%, Christian Arab: 5%

Main Purpose for visit to Israel: Hiking: 61%, religious 6%, Leisure 4%, Vesting Friends and Family 2%, Academic 24%, see a new area 3%

Motivation to Hike: Experience Israel 6%, Enjoy Hiking 55%, Religious 24%, Finished IDF 15%

Case Study Mitzpe Ramon Socio-Cultural Perceptions of Personnel

The INT allows hikers to see parts of Israel that they may have never ventured to otherwise. A Major part of this is the Negev Region in which Mitzpe Ramon is located. It is a vast area mainly desert, and has few residents and tourists, with the exception of Eilat. Typically many people may think there is nothing to see there other than camels. However, there is so
much more as it is home to many different cultures and religions, including the Bedouins who more recently have found themselves being pushed out by the government. Many immigrants from Russia, Black Hebrews and others have also found themselves in the Negev regions. This includes places such as Dimona or Mitzpe Ramon. In addition, there are many ancient ruins including from the Nabataean that traveled through this area on the Incense Route.

Typically the tourists who come to visit/ hike in Mitzpe Ramon are coming to get away from it all and or experience “odd place out of the way” as the Lonely Planet quotes it (Robinson et al., 2012). The town is currently trying to style itself as an ecotourism destination (Robinson et al., 2012). Overall, Personnel TG-L and B-I would like to see more businesses and lodging become green along the INT.

**Case Study Green Backpackers Socio-Cultural Perceptions of Personnel**

The Green Backpackers, a hostel in Mitzpe Ramon also strives to help out the locals in the town. They re-painted an apartment complex in which they rent out a section of for their guest and have tried to cleanup some of the large amounts of trash in the area. They are very good about educating their guest on things to do in the area, proper ways to hike, and local things to see and do. In addition, they try to educate guest about how to be more sustainable with their compost bucket, herbs in the backyard, and seem to inspire many by their decorations such as doorknobs being reusable items such as a toothpaste container or old wrench. About 80% of the guest here are hikers, but a good majority of them do not realize that the paths they are taking are parts of the Israel National Trail. However, they do receive some INT hikers who are coming from a very long isolated stretch and tend to be very talkative when they arrive as they haven’t had much human interaction in the past few days (Personnel B-H). INT hikers do not make up majority of their guest as they usually do not want to pay and will just stay at a trails angel nearby for free. The Trail Angels are people to allow hikers to stay at their house and can be anyone. Many of the guests here did not seem to interact much with the local community other than shopping locally at the markets. Majority also did not come to the hostel because it was sustainable but wanted a place far away from reality and relaxing. Many of the guests come midweek and few come on Saturday due to buses not running until later because of Shabbat.

**Jesus Trail Socio-Cultural Perceptions of Personnel**
It is very important to understand how the stakeholders along the Jesus trail perceive and address the social aspects of ecotourism. In many less developed regions “tourism has been developed and controlled by large, multinational tour companies who have little regard for local sociocultural, and economic conditions,” this however, is not the case for the Jesus Trail (Timothy, pg. 149 2002). This can be seen as the Jesus Trail was created by stakeholders C-D and C-M who have considered sustainability and ecotourism with development, keeping in mind how to help out area socially, economically, and environmentally. This also helps prevent leakages as there are no foreign organizations involved, which is part of sustainability. The Jesus trail is very popular for tourists from abroad, particularly those from Germany which is something I observed and was also informed about by personnel B-A. This can be seen a reaction to a documentary on the trail played recently there (Personnel B-A). The hikers that come for the Jesus Trail are split between those that hike it for religious purposes and those that do it for a new adventure. Overall, the founders of the Jesus trail believe that the trail is there to help build relationships between “nationalities, cultures, and religions in the Middle East” (Personnel C-D and Jesus Trail Media Letter). This can be seen done as the trail goes through a variety of different types of neighborhoods, which helps overall with the “sustainability of small businesses” (Personnel C-D).

The Jesus trail itself was created as a way for Personnel C-D and C-M to get involved with tourism while making something economically profitable and sustainable for the areas it passes through. This can be looked at as ecotourism, as the Ecotourism Society defines it as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people” (Honey, 1999b). It is also important to note that the Personnel C-D and C-M do not like using the term ecotourism but sustainable tourism, which several analysts prefer using including personnel N-J (Honey, 1999b). The main criteria when creating the trail was to go through as many Christian sites, communities, and cultures as possible. This led to the opening of places such as the Fauzi Azar which I will discuss more in a bit, and the first guest house in Cana bringing more tourists and money into the community. The trail also helps create a new network of different communities which can work together to help make the best of the trail. In addition, In terms of sustainability the personnel believe that the Jesus Trail has created a good model for everyone to follow, and they have no secrets about it, and are happy to share information with anyone. The creators of the Jesus Trail had previously hiked the INT and took
note of how it does not fully allow hikers to appreciate all that Israel has, and does not pass through many different types of communities. Overall, the Jesus Trail is made for pilgrims while also taking hikers off the well beaten path (Lewon, 2012).

It is also interesting to note that in Israel there is also the Gospel Trail which is backed by the Israel Ministry of Tourism, and was inaugurated three years after the Jesus Trail (Personnel C-D). The creation of this trail has led to controversy and confusion by stakeholders and hikers trying to figure out their next adventure. However, some like personnel E-K believe eventually the Gospel Trail will just disappear. The two trails are very similar except for that the Jesus Trail passes through more religious sites, communities that are not just Jewish and is typically easier to reach by public transportation (Village to Village, 2013). In addition, the Jesus Trail has been known to be typically better marked by the Society For Protection of Nature in Israel and also allows hikers to get water and food easier (Personnel B-A). Overall, it is important that in the socio-cultural senses of sustainability that the Jesus trail to allow hikers to learn more about other cultures in a balanced way, “think local” which would be done by eating locally, dressing appropriately at religious sites, using local transport and talking with local people including learning basic phrases in local languages (Village to Village, 2013).

**Illaniya Socio- Culture Perceptions of Personnel**

“The Lower Galilee region is typically viewed as a closed pearl,” as it has so much potential for tourism including the Jesus Trail, Israel National Trail, and Golan Trails that pass through (Personnel B-A). However, it does not receive as many tourists, particularly when compared to big cities such as Jerusalem or Tel Aviv who tourists are more familiar with. Majority of tourists in the Lower Galilee are visiting the region for the first time, majority which are just hiking through (Personnel B-A). However, it is generally very peaceful region in Israel. In one article by Lewson, he discusses that the Arab vs. Jews conflict occurring in Israel seems less intense in the Galilee area where Illaniya is located. They live in separate towns but in a peaceful way (Lewson 2012).

Illaniya is one of the communities affected by the creation of the Jesus Trail. It is a small Moshav made up of about 50% farms and run by Jews. Without it, Yarok Az the organic goat farm would have never opened up and many would not know of the small Moshav in general.
Typically hikers along the Jesus Trail come and stop for the night and occasionally some just stop at Yarok for a rest or to enjoy their pool. Those that are not hiking through and come to Yarok Az are usually the Israeli families that came to visit Yarok Az for just a few hours or to campout for Shabbat. Camping and or spending Shabbat travelling is very typical of the Israeli Culture. Personnel BW-B is very good about inviting others that he met to come and visit the farm, even if it’s just to allow children to play with the farm animals.

The Moshav of Illaniya where Yarok Az was located seemed very friendly to the outsider, but once one actually walked through it that view seemed to change. With three Israel Defense Forces bases located within, many soldiers walk throughout, which may make the foreigner not used to seeing so many machine guns a bit nervous. However, I found the most unsettling thing about the Moshav was that every house seemed to have a German Shepard that would bark very loudly to all who passed by. This created a barrier in the Moshav when doing my research as I was not able to get to as many locals’ houses/ guesthouses in the area as I did not feel safe doing so.

Sustainably Lodging along the Jesus Trail: A Look at the Fauzi Azar

Lodging in the North varies, but with the growth of the Jesus Trail places such as Cana have seen their first guesthouses open. Many short term hikers do not come to places such as Yarok Az as it isn’t fancy enough and they would much rather stay in the nearby Kibbutz. Various personnel discussed how many hikers on the Jesus Trail did stop at Fauzi Azar as it is a main point for the trail but rarely INT hikers stayed there.

The Fauzi Azar hostel in Nazareth is a great example of a place trying to help out the local community along the trails. Personnel C-D is a co-owner of it and the Jesus Trail which were both created with sustainability in mind. The place was opened in the Arab city of Nazareth in an old Arab mansion, and became the first guesthouse/ hostel there. Fauzi Azar tries to help out locals in the area as much as it can and supports a Palestinian orphanage nearby. They buy food that they serve their guest and office supplies from the local market. In addition, they use locals for maintenance and hire residents to work there, along with volunteers that come from across the world. There is also a program that connects guest with locals and which allows them to become more aware about the area and a free tour offered of the city daily. Also the Fauzi uses
technology that helps them conserve water and energy, and helps out families in need within Nazareth. Workers are also able to make an “honest living” here and help raise self-esteem of the community (Personnel C-D). In addition, to all of that volunteers that come to Fauzi such as Personnel TG-C, are able to extend their help to areas within the city including at the local orphanage or hospital. After Fauzi was opened up a worker left to then open up another guesthouse also in Nazareth in which the two have no hard feelings towards each other and Fauzi sends guest when overflowed. Lastly, they are very good about helping hikers find trails and or plan their Jesus Trail hiking experience for them (Fauzi Azar Inn, 2013 and Personnel C-D).

The Pope also visited Nazareth where Fauzi Azar is located in 2009, which was a big event for the area. Nazareth is known for its many Christian sites including Mary’s Well. Before the Pope arrived Israel spent lots of money in order to clean and fix up the town of Nazareth. However, after his visit there was not much done to upkeep everything that had been transformed and Personnel C-D believes it will all go to waste.

Conclusion

Backpacker tourism along Israel’s Trails may not necessarily lead to a large increase in employment but lead to “greater self-fulfillment and self-determination for small communities” (Ooi et al. 2009). We can already see this starting to occur with more lodging and small shops opening up and benefiting from hikers along the trails, especially up north along the Jesus Trail. Overall, majority of personnel do not want much government involvement with tourism development, except for more money being given to places outside of the periphery. In addition, there are so many unique cultures throughout Israel that by implementing sustainable tourism many could benefit them. Trail can also help make hikers more aware of problems occurring such as Bedouin displacement in the South and poverty up North. However, we must first educate the locals, government, and hikers before this can unfold appropriately.
Chapter 6
Economic Perceptions of Ecotourism along Israel’s Trails

Introduction
The final section of sustainability within tourism and trails is the economic component. Economics is a very important element within ecotourism and sustainable tourism definitions, we must consider “economic benefits to the local human population” when developing sustainable tourism (Taylor et al. 2009). With ecotourism and sustainable tourism a place should be made economically profitable for the locals. “It is widely assumed that tourism can help to eliminate the widening economic gap between developed and less developed countries and regions and ensure the steady acceleration of economic and social development, in particular in developing countries” (Mihalic pg. 81, 2002). It is difficult to calculate exactly how trails have helped out Israel economically. However, there is more of a want for the Jesus Trail more so than the Israel National Trail to help out areas economically, as seen by completing my methods. Hiking a trail can be quite expensive or extremely cheap for a backpacker/hiker depending on the length they are going for, the area hiked, and if they already own the proper equipment. In addition, the rough landscape of the South brings up many problems for hikers economically, such as the high prices they may need to pay to get water. Overall, a major concern is how much trails help out Israel economically, as it is one of the main tiers of sustainable tourism.

Israel National Trail: “Economics”

Types of INT Hikers and their Economic Effect
When looking at the stakeholders along the INT there are two main types of hikers; those recently out of the Israel Defense Forces and those that do the sections over a long period of time, maybe once a month or so. Those coming out of the IDF are looked at as the least profitable, at least by many stakeholders along the trail that I interviewed. Many of the recent soldiers do not have much money to spend hiking which becomes a problem (Personnel B-A). This leads to them not always paying to stay at lodging along the trail (Personnel B-A, B-H, & N-J). In addition, many of them have been known to go around the National Parks which have them pay along the INT also bringing less money in (Personnel B-A). Personnel BW-B noted that this happens a lot at Mt. Arbel National Park as many of the INT hikers take a longer way
around it along the highway. Lastly these types of hikers are known to also put up tents anywhere, including in areas which are illegal. This can cause environmental problems and does not bring any money into the economy (Personnel NP-E). In addition, many hikers go home for Shabbat which also brings less money into lodging and other services along the INT.

When discussing with various hikers, it became apparent that travelling sustainably was not a priority of theirs, and they viewed hiking the INT as more of a patriotic event. Overall, many of the INT hikers doing the entire trail at once are not known to carry much money on them, which leads several stakeholders such as Personnel B-A to believe the INT is economically unsustainable (Personnel B-A).

The other main groups of hikers are those that do the trail in small sections over a longer period of time. These hikers are typically mid to upper level income, in terms of money they have to spend, and of an older age (Personnel TG-F). Overall, they can be more economically beneficial to the INT as they will spend the night in a lodging along the trail and eat at local places and do more touristy activities, such as visiting a museum. This more so fits the definition of sustainability if the money stays locally, and is not leaked out by staying in foreign hotels or such making them less sustainable.

**Views of Personnel on INT Hikers**

Several stakeholders had opinions that INT hikers typically think that they deserve free stuff (Personnel E-K & NP-E). There are Trail Angels along the INT, in which majority do allow hikers to stay for free, whether it is outside on a lawn or indoors on a bed. Hikers are only able to reserve a stay 24 hours in advance and each trail angels offer a variety of services such as a meal, laundry, or even Wi-Fi. This is a similar to many places along the Camino de Santiago that take in Pilgrims hiking the trail (Personnel C-M). Personnel N-J discussed that many high school students in the Tel Aviv area would like to become trail angels, but it will take some time to teach them all they need to know in order to do so.

An interesting idea of how to spread awareness about INT in Israel is with group events. Personnel TG-F participated in conducting projects for groups to do a section of the INT, such as with the Prison guards and Police for their 60th birthday celebration. They had a day created where employees where go out giving each unit a section of the trail to hike so they would cover all of it in one day. However, the Police had to back out unfortunately at the last minute.. These
events had the huge potential to bring in lots of money from selling shirts and such. However, this would only be a one day thing and not help out tourism along the trail in the long run. These fluctuations are in particular not helpful to local businesses along the trails as they then use up all their resources for the project. Lastly these projects are not well marketed, but if done so could potentially bring in more money and companies wanting to get involved (Personnel TG-F).

**Perceptions of Personnel on how the Private Sector and Government Benefit Economically from the INT**

One thing when looking at stakeholder’s perceptions and practices of sustainability goals of ecotourism along the INT is how they benefit economically from it. Society For Protection of Nature in Israel who are the main people responsible for Israel’s Trails including the INT, make a profit from selling their maps. To make their profit from the maps, this is done every four years for each trail. Every trail is re-marked every three years so that hikers can clearly find the paths. However, down South the INT trail is always changing due to the IDF firing zones and it is important to get online updates before hiking. Also, INT maps are only in Hebrew which can deter international tourists from purchasing them. I talked with Personnel TC-G about why this was and he discussed that currently the INT is not well known to international hikers so it would not be financial to make English maps. That would require a lot of work and power and nobody have stepped up to do it. Personnel B-I actually has published a book with English maps of the INT. However, many such as Personnel TG-F find them difficult to read, and hikers must also find ways to be informed of the many changes such as with firing zones elsewhere. In addition, SPNI makes money by having field schools along parts of the INT including in Mitzpe Ramon. In Figure 6.1 you can see the Har Negev Field School located along the Macktesh Ramon with a blue trail going down not far from the Green Trail which also enters the Macktesh from Mitzpe. There they recently changed the actual route of the INT to specifically go through their school which may attract more guests. However, you can still take the old pathway as markers are still there and not have to go a bit out of your way.
Personnel B-P discussed in an article how until recently Israel Tourism industry has not done much to invest in foreign backpackers/ hikers. This is because as they did not believe they
bring much money into the economy (Gilad, 2012). Personnel B-P believes that “in the past, the Israeli Tourism industry gave up on our clientele completely because they were considered down- and- out and cheap (Gilad, 2012). That’s a mistake because a guest who stays with us will spend more on the whole throughout his visit than other guest… (Gilad, 2012). The group he refers to are the backpacker and hikers seen at places such as the Green Backpackers, Fauzi Azar, and his hostel the Abraham's hostel in Jerusalem. The INT does go along the Green Backpackers Hostel and near the other two. However, more recently backpackers/hikers have been identified as a niche market and many such as the Green Backpackers and Personnel C-D & B-P are targeting them and opening up new lodging for them.

**Pricing Issues along the INT**

Economically hiking the INT in the South can be expensive due to the issues of getting food and water. As discussed previously there are two options for INT hikers to get water and food in the Negev desert when they are not near a town being; by cache or Jeep. Water Caching may be the cheaper option as it does not require much money to do unless you have hired someone to burry your water. Hiring a Jeep however is quite expensive which leads to typically only larger groups with more money to hire them. However, recently in 2013 a new Jeep service called Water Drop has been created in Mitzpe Ramon that aims to help out single or small groups of hikers to be able to use Jeep services at a cheaper price (Personnel TG-F). The program uses local suppliers and is run by a local personnel in Mitzpe Ramon that allows for no leakages outside of the town and helps them out economically a bit more.

**Hikers Perceptions “Economics”**

It is important to understand how hikers feel about the trails and their prices. If things are too expensive or not enjoyable, then fewer hikers surveyed will come and less money will come back into Israel’s economy. Over half of the hikers would recommend the INT and Jesus Trail as shown below in Table 6.1. It’s good to see that 75% would hike the trails again showing there is a possibility for an increase in hikers overall. Many INT hikers would also like to hike the Jesus Trail yet not as many Jesus Trail hikers would like to hike the INT as seen in the figure below. Overall, my results show positive statistics for the potential of more hikers coming onto either trail which could bring in more money. Guide Books and magazines were one of the main ways
that hikers heard about the trails as shown in Table 6.1 below. Many had also learned about the trails from friends or other internet sources. If there is an increase in advertising and marketing of the trails this also could bring more hikers to Israel.

Table 6.1: Economic Survey Questions

Would you recommend the trails? Yes INT: 50%, No INT: 20%, Parts INT 30%, Yes Jesus Trail: 88%, Jesus Trail: 12%

Would you Hike the trails Again? Yes 75%, No 15%, Maybe 10%
Would you hike the INT if you haven't already?: Yes 29%, No 71%
Have you hiked the Trails Before: Yes INT 38%, No Jesus Trail 62%
Were Cost Reasonable Along the Trails? Yes 64%, No 36%
How did you hear about the Jesus Trail or INT: Israeli Hiker: 3%, Internet Source: 15%, Guide Book/Magazine: 32%, NY Times: 15%, Friends: 19%, Professor: 6%, Fauzi Azar: 10%

Overall INT’s Economic Impact

Overall, it is quite hard to measure how much economic impact the INT has on Israel’s economy. This is due to several factors, such as nobody doing much research on the impacts and no head count on the numbers of hikers doing the trail each year. However, the income coming from tourism has increased over the past few years with a 3% increase to 4.4 billion in 2012 in Israel. This is only 2.3% of the total GDP as Israel’s economy relies more on communications/transportation and construction (Turner, 2013). There is also only a small percentage of investment being 4.8% into tourism and several such as Personnel E-K believe Israel should focus most of this on pilgrimage tourism (Turner, 2013). In 2013 Israel also hit a record number of tourists reaching 3.54 million but it is hard to tell how many came to hike the trails (JTA, 2014). Yet, if Israel were to start becoming more internationally recognized for their trails there is a chance for her tourism industry to grow economically.

Economic Factors of Mitzpe Ramon
The Negev Region is not a wealthy area similar to Israel’s Northern Region, with the exception of Eilat. This can be seen do to several factors, such as it is more difficult to reach and geopolitical conditions (Reichel et al, 2003). In the case of Mitzpe Ramon specifically which lies along the INT, it is not the wealthiest of towns, and 10% of the residents are unemployed, “which are nearly double the national average and the wages are lower” (Rozenberg, 2012). However, 40% of the 5,000 residents do tourism related work. However, one of fanciest hotel in Israel called the Beresheet is in Mitzpe Ramon, which the government has invested millions in (Rozenberg, 2012). Many celebrities such as Alicia Keys come to stay in the resort. This causes an uneven shift in the economy of Mitzpe as most of the money actually leaves the town, making a leakage, and those who stay there do not shop at the local shops and such (Personnel B-H).

Several believe tourism could help Mitzpe out and Professor Arie Reichel at Ben Gurion University believes “Tourism is an industry that contributes to regional development” (Rozenberg 2012). Majority of the residents are immigrants and also many on welfare have been moved to Mitzpe which helps shape the economics (Vilnay 2010 and Personnel B-H).

**Perceptions of Personnel on INT impacts in Mitzpe Ramon and nearby areas**

With the INT passing through Mitzpe Ramon it is important to understand how it affects the town, if any at all economically. Overall, though “Economic contribution of the backpackers market is difficult to deny, especially for marginal communities in less developed countries that possess minimal skills and resources (Ooi et. Al 2009). Personnel TG-F believes that the town has benefited economically from the INT but not greatly. Personnel B-O believes the INT has helped Mitzpe grow economically, specifically the local grocery store. Personnel TG-L believes that the INT specifically offers opportunity for various communities an opportunity to work together to make their area more economically profitable.

Personnel TG-F believes that other small towns in the Negev have benefited more as they have less industry there, such as the tiny kibbutz of Har Amasa outside of Arad. In addition, nearby Sde Boker which is not exactly on the trail has benefited economically a bit from the INT. This is due to a grocery store located there that is easy to get to for hikers after a long stretch of nothing. However, Personnel B-H and B-O believe that the “local supermarket in Mitzpe Ramon has also benefited from hikers wanting a treat from a long rough hike”. I did
observed this to be true as many loved the wonderful variety of fresh fruit and delicious ice cream Israel has to offer. They also believe that the supermarket and local bar Hahavit have benefited from INT hikers doing the entire hike, but still more of an impact could be made. All of this is seen as a result of Mitzpe being in-between two very hard hikes and hikers wanting to treat themselves to shwarma or falafel.

Majority of the people I observed that came to visit Mitzpe Ramon participated in hiking one of the many trails in the area. However, approximately 85% did not realize they were hiking the INT when they were on it, as they had not heard too much about it before. Many of the hikers were interested to learn more about the INT and this history behind it. If more knew about it then there’s more possibility for economic potential, with an increase in tourists coming to hike it. Majority of the hikers did not bring reusable water bottles but instead of buying some at the local market reused past guest bottles that had been left in recycling. This is a positive factor in terms of sustainability, but does not help the area out economically. However, it was very common for hikers who are in Mitzpe for just a short period not specifically hiking the entire INT to shop at the local market and venture downtown. Many that I observed bought gifts from the local stores that sell organic soaps and such. Those that came to the town specifically for just a getaway with their loved one tended to eat at the local restaurants including the more expensive one such as Chez Eugene, and were typically older.

There are also many organizations that claim to be eco-friendly, including the stores talked about above in Mitzpe and the Negev Region. Studies suggest “that desert areas are appropriate for the development of ecotourism since they are usually unspoiled by industrial or other human activity, consist of geological attractions, provide the visitors with excellent conditions of visibility and facilitate encounters with undisturbed local cultures (Reichel et al, 2009). I believe this quote describes Mitzpe Ramon greatly, as it is located in the desert with just a small population, is home to the largest Macktesh in the world offering magnificent geological sights, offers great views, and you can come in contact with local Bedouins all along the INT.

**Case Study Green Backpackers**

In Mitzpe Ramon there are several places in which hikers can stay for cheap. Whether they are just coming in for a small hike, a section of the INT, or completing the whole trail. The Green Backpackers is one of the options for cheaper lodging. Recently they have been listed as
the best outdoor hostel in Israel (Tourist Israel, 2014). However, they mainly end up getting short term hikers, as many INT hikers do not want to pay to stay (Personnel B-H).

Over at the Green Backpackers hostel in Mitzpe Ramon Personnel B-H and TG-F would like to help out the community economically, but often have to buy supplies elsewhere, or hire outside people, as the locals are quite expensive. However, they offer a green activities booklet for guest to use offering weekly activities and sending them to nearby National Parks, which spreads the tourist’s money in the region, and they don’t take any commission themselves. Personnel B-H notes though that hikers doing the entire INT tend to not do these activities or any others, as they just want to finish the trail, which does not help areas out economically. In addition, at the Green Backpackers they hire local people to help clean the hostel. This is interesting to note as they already have volunteers that come and help, but they find it is still important to hire local people to help out Mitzpe Ramon’s economy.

**Jesus Trail “Economics”**

When Personnel C-D and C-M created the Jesus Trail they saw the economic potential it had for the Northern region of Israel, which is typically poorer and less visited, especially when compared to places such as Tel Aviv or Jerusalem. This is quite different from the original idea of the INT, as economic benefits are a major focus. They believe that it’s very important for the Jesus Trail or any others to make money without being subsidized by the government. The money profited should also be invested back into the community and nature who are the main beneficiaries of tourism. Many believe that the Jesus Trail has actually begun to help out places economically. Personnel C-D believes this can be seen just from hikers buying food and water from local communities along the trail. Personnel TC-G believes that this may only help communities economically though only a small bit.

Unlike the INT, there are some estimated numbers about the Jesus Trail. In 2013 it is estimated that 3,500 people hiked the trail and by 2015 the goal is to have 10,000 walkers (Personnel C-D and Jesus Trail Update). These walkers in 2013 have then had approximately 15,750 nights sold in the local accommodations which (Personnel C-D and Jesus Trail Update). Overall, this has contributed to $900,000 in 2013 and by 2015 they are estimating an impact of $2.5 million (Personnel C-D Jesus Trail Update). These predicted large estimates are predicted as there are also plans to continue expanding the Jesus Trail so that more communities and small
businesses will be helped out also (Personnel C-D & Jesus Trail Update). This can be quite helpful to the Northern area if managed correctly and help many places out. In addition, with no foreign investment the money earned does not leave the Northern region allowing for no leakages.

With Nazareth being the starting point and base for the trail it has been able to be economically helped the most. There majority of the Jesus Trail hikers stay at the Fauzi Azar, which offers many opportunities, including tours into the Golan Heights and daily free tours of the city whose market can be quite confusing to navigate( Fauzi Azar Inn 2013). Other places are seeing progress such as with Cana building their first guesthouse to allow for guest to actually stay the night and spend more money there possibly during their stay.

Hiking the Jesus Tail can be as pricey or cheap as the hiker would like. There are Jesus Trail tours that set everything up for hikers including luggage transfer that I found many of the guest I came in contact with did use. With the tour you have the option at choosing how far of a hike you would like to go each day and what type of lodging you would like based on price. A group of high school students hiking the trail found it easiest to do a tour so that their luggage could all be transferred and even arranged for meals at their lodging. I was fortunate enough to partake on a luggage transfer one day and the owners I came across seemed happy to help out the hikers. There is also a book available to purchase that directs one throughout the Jesus Trail which is hand whether you do a tour or not. The book not only offers maps and directions, but gives detailed descriptions of each area, where to eat, where to sleep, what to do etc...Fortunately this book is in English as international tourists are a target for the trail. The Jesus Trail website also allows updates for hikers to take note of, so they don't get lost.

**Economic Factors of Illaniya**

In my case study of Illaniya there are just a few options of places to stay for visitors and hikers. The Moshav is located along the Jesus Trail and about 30 minutes off of the INT, which has allowed for a high increase in visitors there. In addition, it has allowed for places such as Yarok Az to be created which is also the main place to stay for those wanting a cheap lodging option. Those just looking for a nicer getaway may choose one of the boutique hotels located in Illaniya. However, one just passing through may not realize that’s what they are as there is not much advertisement. At Yarok Az hikers or just regular guest coming in for Shabbat can pay a
small fee to stay in a tent or eco-friendly dome and pay a slightly higher fee to stay in a cabin. They may also purchase a meal. However, only a few hikers during my observations purchased breakfast during their stay. It was quite a fun dynamic to watch groups of hikers though that did not always know each other before come together to share and cook meals together. Most of the food purchased for guest meals did not come from the market in Illaniya as Personnel B-A found many wanted more Americanized foods like peanut butter that she has to buy elsewhere. In addition, guest can pay extra fees for food but showers, Wi-Fi, and access to the pool are all included. Personnel B-A who runs Yarok Az believes that it will take a while for her to make a full living off her lodging and is thankful that her husband also works. On this section of the Jesus Trail hikers also have the option to stay at Kibbutz Lavi just a bit farther north of Illaniya, but it is a more expensive option.

In Illaniya there are several restaurants and a small shop that hikers may stop at during their stay. One of the restaurants Makom B'Sejera is actually an old home of former Prime Minister Ben Gurion and is listed on English sites about Illaniya. However, the restaurant is typically locked up and guarded by one of the many German Shepherds throughout the village. Visitors looking for food can also stop at the Meat restaurant right next door that is known to be more on the pricier side so no hiker I came across ate there. Also next to the two restaurants is the village’s only market in which Personnel B-A suggested was also a bit pricier than usual so she does not buy everything there, but still does some shopping order to support the local community. On Shabbat the Moshav shuts down and all is closed except for a Lebanese Restaurant across the way whose price is a bit expensive. The workers were kind enough to keep open one Shabbat for a few lost hikers that came hungry to Yarok Az. Lastly those looking for something quick and cheap there is a sandwich shop located in Illaniya which actually gets most of their business from being right next to one of the army bases in the Moshav.

Trail and Ecotourism Development in Israel

“Ecotourism is viewed as a potential path for promoting sustainable development (Telfer, pg. 75, 2002). With more development, there is a larger chance that a larger amount of money can flow in from new services to an area. However, this can also cause damage to the area if not developed right. Personnel B-I author of the INT guide book does not think there should be
anymore development along the INT. Others such as Personnel B-A, C-D, N-J, E-K, and TG-L do believe that there should be a little development occurring along it and other trails. However, Personnel TG-L a tour guide in Israel believes that the country should focus more on renewable recourses and would like to see more bird watching and nature themed activities along the trails. Personnel TC-G believes there should be more green lodging along the trails, but that is not everyone’s opinion. As for Personnel E-K she believes that there are possibilities for ecotourism development such as campsites lodges and small restaurants along the trail. Personnel TC-G would like to see more green development along the INT and more logistic support such as for water which may make the INT more popular, however, he claims that is not everyone’s opinion.

It is important to understand what type of development hikers would like to see along Israel’s trails if any at all. If the hikers are not happy then they will not return to the trails or even recommend them to others. This can have a negative chain reaction on the economy of the areas along the trails as less money will be brought in. In addition, by understanding the themes that hikers may want along the trails can help us understand their desire for sustainable activates. The results for both can be seen below in Figure 6.2. What stuck out the most desired is how hikers would like to see more lodging and restaurants along the trails. This shows that hikers are willing to spend money along the trails and we must just make sure that these new developments if they were to occur are done on a local level so that leakages do not occur. In addition, many would like to see more of a Bible stories theme and local cultures. However, at the same time many noted they did not want more local cultures under development. Many included that they would also like to see more of a theme with Ancient Cultures. In the areas around Mitzpe Ramon where the INT goes through there are unmarked Nabataean ruins. Also, up north in Moshav Illaniya along the Jesus Trail there are first century sites such as a synagogue as talked about before. These results show the want by Hikers to have these sites better marked and cleaned up so that they can experience such unique and ancient history.
Table 6.2: Hiker desire for Development and various Themes along the trails

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<td>Animals:</td>
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<td>Local Culture:</td>
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Butler’s Model and Israel’s Trails

One way to look at development along Israel’s Trails is by Butler’s Lifecycle Model (1975) (See Figure 6.2) (Butler, 1974). The model shows “growth, stagnation and decline phases of a tourist destination (Aguilo et al., 2005). By looking at this model, those developing tourism can identify possible warnings that may harm an area such as running out of non-renewable resources (Butler, 1975 pg. 11 Aguilo).

There are five stages of Butler’s model being; “exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, and stagnation” followed by rejuvenation or decline (Tularam et al. 2012). When looking at the Jesus Trail on Butler’s Lifecycle Model, the trail is seen at the stage of involvement as tourists’ arrivals are higher than ever, and more are becoming aware internationally and domestically of the trail. It is not quite yet at the development stage as many of the facilities are just being created within the past few years and are not fully developed (Tularam et al. 2012). However, due to recent politics in the Northern Region and being a lesser known tourism area the Jesus Trail will take quite some time to reach the other stages. However, it still will most likely reach them before the INT does.

When looking at the INT on Butler’s Lifecycle Model, the trail can be seen at a similar stage of the Jesus Trail being at involvement, even though it has been around for quite a bit longer. This stage can be seen below in Figure 6.2. With National Geographic naming the INT as one of the top trails in 2012, more people have become aware of the trail (National Geographic, 2012). However, due to the trail’s difficulty and maps only being in Hebrew it has not reached any of its potential for more tourists. In addition, due to the areas that the trail goes through including much Isolation in the Negev, there is not too much development of facilitates. This can also be an effect of many hikers staying at family’s homes called Trail Angels which makes less need for lodging. It is interesting to note though that the INT does go near major cities such as Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Eilat which have exceptions to their stage on Butler’s model. Overall, it will be quite some time until the INT reaches consolidation or even stagnation which can be good for keeping it untouched and passing through ecotourism sites.
Conclusion:

Economic impacts of sustainable development have been largely questioned, especially if there is poor management (Li 2012). This argument can be seen not just economically, but by socio-cultural and environmental impacts between the INT who does not have proper management and the Jesus trail which does have better management. Overall, the economic impact of Israel’s trails is very important within if it is sustainable or not. Currently, the Jesus Trail has begun to make an economic impact on the North and the INT has had a slight impact on small communities and grocery stores in the South. This may be due to the hiker’s mindset and not having being sustainable been a main goal. However, there is tremendous potential for both trails to be more economically profitable. The INT will not be able to gain more economic profits until something is changed about how hikers can get water in the South and there is better management along the different sections. Tourism is the third largest industry within Israel, with hiking not being a large component of it, due to not being internationally well known for its trails. However, if more people learn about the trails and spread it along to others this could lead to more hikers and tourism along them and open up the possibility for more money to flow.
Chapter 7

Final Conclusion

Answers to Research Question

In this section I will answer my research question that has been discussed in my previous chapters. I will answer my question by analyzing my interviews, surveys, and observations done during my research. Overall, these questions will come together to answer my main question of: *How do perceptions and practices of stakeholders on the Israel National Trail and Jesus Trail affect the sustainability of the trails?* -are explained below:

Stakeholders of the INT and Jesus Trail generally recognize and understand the environmental problems along the trails. Many of these problems can be seen just by walking a small section of the trail, especially in areas such as up north, where trash is a major problem and down south where hikers struggle with how to get water. Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism are both becoming an increased goal by many major stakeholders and personnel, such as Society For Protection of Nature in Israel. They realize how important it is for Israel to protect its beautiful landscape and scenery for all to enjoy. In addition, stakeholders realize that there must be many changes in terms of ecotourism development along trails in Israel. This includes having a better environmental education program in Israel, not just for hikers along trails, but the local people in the communities they affect. This way people can better understand their affects, whether it be from the trash they create or construction from new development that may destroy the environment. National Trail and Jesus Trail stakeholders have a general understanding that proper management needs to occur without too much help of the government in order for the trails to succeed and be sustainable. Proper management of the Jesus Trail has already allowed for stakeholders to start addressing the environmental problems, such as with National Clean up the World Day. Yet with the INT being so long and having no solid management, problems on how to preserve its environment, and improper implementation of ecotourism still occurs. This can also be seen from many stakeholders simply not wanting to take on this major responsibility. Also, in terms of stakeholder’s perceptions of sustainability of the environment, they are not as
proactive about helping out. Many hikers do not seem to want to change their lifestyle in terms of where they stay. This can be seen from many sleeping on illegal campgrounds or others wanting uncommon foods such as peanut butter in small communities.

Jesus Trail stakeholders are largely aware with regards to how they can help out local communities and their cultures. This is a main concern of the creators when forming the trail and for expanding it. They have addressed it specifically by making sure the Jesus Trail goes through as many different sites as possible, not just Jewish or Christian sites. This has allowed for many new lodging to develop, including Yarok Az that dedicates itself to trying to be an ecotourism site. In addition, they have practiced sustainability by having various volunteers help out at local places, such as the Palestinian Orphanage in Nazareth, by hiring local people for maintenance, providing free tours in the area, and buying local products in majority of the time.

As for the INT, the stakeholders claim they want to help out as many communities as possible and preserve its cultural diversity. This is a main reason the SPNI market the INT as a trail that allows hikers to see parts of Israel that they may never visit otherwise. However, how they practice sustainability is a problem. Those in charge of developing and updating the trails of the INT have been largely criticized by several stakeholders for having the path go through relatively few different cultures, and mainly only Jewish Towns. Over in Mitzpe Ramon, the Green backpackers do practice socio-cultural aspect of ecotourism very well by educating their guests and hikers along the INT about local places and cultures. This includes inviting a local Bedouin to explain more about his culture. As for the hikers not from Israel, they appeared to be unaware and not as educated about the socio-cultural aspects along Israel’s Trails in general, which can be addressed with better education programs and management of the trail. Those from Israel hiking the INT did not appear to care much about this and also did not show the want to be more educated as many did not stop at visitor centers, museums, or even the National Parks that the trail runs through.

Stakeholders along the Jesus Trail see the potential the Galilee area has to benefit economically from the trail. This is addressed as the creators have worked with many in the small communities the trail passes through, encouraging them to open up new lodging. In addition, many hikers are encouraged to pay fair prices and shop and stay at local places along the way helping the area out economically without leakages. Other major stakeholders in the
area, such as the Israeli government have also started to slowly identify the economic potential in the Galilee. This can be seen with the creation of the Gospel Trail, which is eerily similar to the Jesus Trail. The government, however, has not done much to address the economic aspects of the INT. Other Stakeholders along the INT do not quite see as much potential to benefit economically from the trail except for in very small communities. They perceive those doing the INT in small sections over a long period of time as helping out areas more economically than those hiking the whole trail at once. Some stakeholders see the potential to hold large events for various companies along the INT as a way to help out areas economically, but in the end realize it’s not sustainable as many resources are used in a small period of time. Others stakeholders such as those in Mitzpe Ramon, see some potential hikers may have along the INT, especially if they can increase the number of international hikers coming through. However, the SPNI a major stakeholder in both trails directly see the potential the INT especially has for them to benefit economically. This is addressed from them being the main producer of maps and by having field schools for hikers to stay at along the way. However, in terms of sustainability, this does not benefit the local communities which the trails pass through as much as the money goes directly to the company.

**Israel’s Future in Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism**

Tourism in Israel has been steadily increasing over the past few years, along with an increase in trails, and the number of international backpackers coming in. More and more backpackers’ hostels are popping up and with cheaper forms of lodging, along the Jesus Trail and INT. In addition, Israel is seeing an increase of trails occurring with the new Haifa Urban trail and upcoming Beer Sheva Trail.

Thanks to those developing the Jesus Trail and various other stakeholders, such as the Green Backpackers and those at Ecotourism Israel, this is a small glimpse of hope for ecotourism development in Israel. In terms of the environment, Israel needs to start considering its effects from development more and more, and also find a way for hikers to get water easily and cheaper while hiking in the Negev. In addition, more needs to be done to better educate hikers and also allow the trails to explore various cultures without stereotyping them. Lastly, Israel must work on making sure that leakages do not occur along its trails, especially in areas that may need it,
such as in Mitzpe Ramon. In the long run for all of this to occur more stakeholders, locals, and hikers along trails must be better educated on how to be more sustainable in all aspects first.

**Contributions to Geographic Literature**

Literature on tourism has been very fragmented in the past and literature on the INT and Jesus Trail has been little to none. By looking at and understanding National Trail and Jesus Trail stakeholder’s perceptions and practices of sustainability along the trails, I am able to contribute to geographic, ecotourism, and trail literature. I am strongly contributing a more comprehensive look at tourism. Specifically my research helps contribute to the geographic areas of the Galilee Region and Mitzpe Ramon in which very little has been looked at. This is important as they are growing areas in Israel and are made up of many different cultures and landscapes with which many areas around the world can relate. Theses case sites are also interesting as they are located in Israel who has a developed economy but the sites themselves are not fully developed. In addition, I add to not just literature on tourism and trails but also National Trails with my information on the rarely researched Jesus Trail and INT.

Ecotourism itself is the fastest growing sector in the largest industry of tourism. Many have discussed the importance of ecotourism and how it can help out an area preserve its environment, culture, and be economically profitable (Akama 2007). This can be seen even with the dedication of the International Year of Ecotourism by the UN in 2002 (Butcher 2006).

Within ecotourism my research contributes to each of the three pillars of sustainable tourism. From an environmental perspective of sustainable tourism tourists are expected to be more aware of their actions (Reichel 2007). Within my research I found that many were aware of their actions but still did not care, particularly when it came to finding the cheapest lodging. This can be seen from a lack of education and information about ecotourism and sustainable travel. On the other hand many hikers did start to notice the actions of locals, specifically when it came to the large amounts of trash along the trails, and were more aware of where and how to dispose theirs because of this. Trash was such a big part of ruining the environment in Israel and it has been largely left out of ecotourism literature, particularly in dealing with sustainable trails. In addition, my research contributes to discussion on water issues along trails. Israel is a country struggling for water, more so in the Negev desert where the INT goes through. The water issues
along the INT are different than from most other trails as it’s much more difficult to get water and one can only obtain it from caching or by Jeep.

Majority of research into the recreation ecology of walking trails has traditionally focused on high use of mountainous environments in Europe and the United States (Randall et al 2008). My research however, contributes to trails in the desert and Middle East specifically.

From a Socio-Cultural perspective, ecotourism allows local communities to regain and or keep their culture while letting tourists learn about them (Walter 2012). However, in order for this to happen, proper development needs to occur and all stakeholders must work together. My research specifically adds to this as it shows how conflicts within stakeholders such as the Government, can lead to tourists not learning about other cultures easily, particularly when it comes to the INT. Integrated ecotourism is starting to occur especially within the Negev region as a way to gain more tourists (Tchetchi, 2006). My research adds to literature on integrated ecotourism with looking at how various lodging along the Trails try to be sustainable but must include more such as the Pool at Yarok Az, to gain more tourists and keep everyone happy.

Lastly within sustainable tourism literature many have not looked at the economic affect, especially when it comes to looking at sustainable trails. Ecotourism should help create employment and reduce leakages within a community (Duffy, 2002). In addition, it should be economically feasible for an area (Akama 2007 and Jaini 2012). By looking at the Jesus Trail, research specifically on how proper management and working with local communities can be seen as a positive way to reduce leakages. If this is not done properly areas can lose out on money (Collins-Kreiner 2010). Along the INT we can see majority of the money staying in local communities as hikers stay at local lodging and don’t shop at chain restaurants necessarily. In addition, my research shows that many new lodging have opened up along both the Jesus Trail and INT creating new employment.

Overall, within trail literature the concept of sustainable tourism has been absent. A major problem with sustainable trail development is that those creating them are not very educated on sustainable tourism development (Vas 2013). My research contributes to this as we can see problems with the INT, in which those who developed it did not have a background in tourism and sustainability. However, the creators and developers of the Jesus Trail do have more
of a background in tourism and sustainability which has produced more of a positive trail within the three pillars of sustainable tourism.

There is very little research out there on how stakeholders view sustainability along trails. Stakeholders are very important to ecotourism development, as if they do not understand the concept properly negative impacts can occur in an area (McGahey 2012). It is essential for proper sustainable tourism development along trails that everyone involved is happy. This can be seen along the two trails of my research as many are unaware of their impacts and how to become more sustainable, leaving these areas to not reach their full sustainable tourism potential. If implemented properly, areas in Israel and local communities can regain their culture in a less stereotyped way (Walter 2012). Overall, my analysis of looks at their perceptions and practices of sustainability and ecotourism can contribute to more positive and sustainable trail developments in the future not just in Israel but all over the world.

Overall, geographers are now starting to look at stakeholders' perceptions, as they are very important when it comes to tourism development having positive impacts. In addition, many geographers are discussing ecotourism and sustainable tourism which can be seen in the new articles in *Tourism Geographies* or *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*. 


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Appendix

Demographics of Hikers N=35

Country of Residence: USA- 22%, Israel- 24%, Ukraine- 3%, Netherlands- 5%, Germany- 22%, Canada- 22%, Scotland- 2%

Age: 18-25- 46%, 26-35- 30%, 35-45- 0%, 45-55- 8%, 55-65- 16%

Education: High School- 22%, IDF- 11%, College- 32%, Masters/ PhD- 19%, Professional- 16%

Gender: Female- 63%, Male 37%

On a Tour: Yes-32%, No- 68%

Survey Questions

Did you base your Lodging Type based on if it is eco- friendly or not ?

How did you do your Laundry during Hike?

Did you use a reusable water bottle vs non reusable?

How do you gather Food for your hike?

What was ecofriendly about sites you stayed at

Extra Comments on Trash

Did you find the trail Difficult to navigate?

Overall do you want better trail markers?

Main Purpose for visit to Israel
Types of Lodging Staying at
Cultures experienced along trails

Motivation To Hike
Would you recommend hiking the trails to others?

Would you Hike the trails Again
How did you hear about the Jesus Trail or INT

Would you hike the INT if you haven't already?

Which Trails have you hiked before
Were Cost Reasonable Along the Trails?

Current Country of Residence
Age:

Highest form of education

Gender

Are you on a Tour?

What type of development would you like to see along the trail based on a 5 point Likers Scale 1 being the most desired and 5 being the least:

Lodging

Restaurants

Coffee Shops

Excursions/ Spas

Souvenirs
Tour Guides

Cultural Activities

Transportation

What development themes would you like to see more of on the trails on a 5 point Likers Scale 1 being the most desired and 5 being the least:

Outdoors:

Nature:

Ancient Cultures:

Bible Stories:

Animals:

Archeology:

Bird Watching:

History:

Local Culture:

Overall do you want better trail markers?

Did you use a reusable water bottle vs non reusable?
**Interview Questions**

What is your Country of Origin: __________

1. How long have you been involved in Tourism?
2. Were you involved in any other previous industries?
3. If yes, then what and why did you switch?
4. What is your Age?
5. What is your Gender?
6. How high of an education do you have?
7. Do you associate your business with the Israel National Trail?
8. Do you believe your service is sustainable? If yes, in which ways…
9. Would you like to continue making your service more sustainable?
10. Are you involved in any ecotourism organizations? If so which_______________________

11. How many guests can your lodge hold?
12. Would you like to see ecotourism standards implemented in Israel?
13. Would you like to see more development in the area?
14. If Yes then what sorts

Examples: Fully developed site___ minimally developed site___ Site with combinations of nature and infrastructure____ only development off of the Trail ___ No development____

15. If yes then which would you prefer more of?

Examples: Lodging___ Restaurants___ Coffee shops___ Excursions___ Spas ____ Souvenir Shops___ Tour Guides___ Cultural actives___ Children’s activities____ Light/Sound shows____ Transportation____ Outdoor activities____

16. What Themes would you like to see more of in tourism development of the area?
Examples: Nature___ Ancient Cultures____ Bible Stories___ Animals___ Archeology___
Bird watching___ History___ Geography____ Local Cultures___ Geology____
Other__________

17. What season do you make the highest profit? Do you face seasonality?
18. In what ways have you made your service more sustainable?
19. Are you aware of ways to make your service more sustainable?
20. Do you find that Tourism in the area has provided long term profits for businesses___?
21. Do you Tourism is a growing industry within the area___
22. How has tourism helped you economically?
23. Do you think the Old buildings and structures have been well kept in the area? If yes in what ways, if no then how do you think they can be better preserved?
24. Do you think Natural sites have been well preserved in the area___ If yes in what ways, if no then how do you think they can be better preserved?
25. How has Tourism helped preserve cultures along the INT or Jesus Trail if any?
26. Would you like to see all businesses become “green” in the area___
27. How important is it to make sure visitors are satisfied with their trip___
28. Do you think there should be more marketing of tourism in the area___
29. Do you think there should be more involvement from the government on tourism in the area___
30. How should hikers go about waste?
31. How should hikers go about cleaning?
32. Where should hikers get water from along the trails?
Executive Summary

Geography of Sustainability: The Israel National Trail and Jesus Trail

Introduction

Ecotourism is the fastest growing sector within the tourism industry. Within ecotourism, trails and National Trails are becoming more and more popular yet they haven’t all been fully explored. People typically think of Israel as a place that is home to major religious sites and unrest, but they don’t think about beautiful trails including, the Israel National Trail & Jesus Trail. However, even though Israel has a fully developed economy, the country does not have a fully developed landscape, leading to an odd combination and a fragile environment. In addition, tourism has not been a main focus of the Israeli government as it is not the number one economic activity, leaving room for the environment and cultures of Israel to not be properly preserved. By researching the sustainability of the Israel National Trail, we can learn new aspects and make new contributions to the literature on ecotourism and trails.

Research Question

*How do perceptions and practices of stakeholders on the Israel National Trail and Jesus Trail affect the sustainability of the trails?*

This research focuses on how the trails of Israel meet ecotourism criteria, focusing on the Israel National Trail (abbreviated INT) from a stakeholder perspective and also examining the Jesus Trail. This question is examined from environmental, social, and economic perspectives of geography. My research question is important as it allows us to understand overall stakeholder perceptions and practices on the sustainability of the Israel National Trail and Jesus Trail, which is essential to improving ecotourism development. To answer this question, I conducted interviews, surveys, and participant observations during summer of 2013, while I was in the...
Lower Galilee Region and Mitzpe Ramon where my case sites are located. I then identify potential areas where ecotourism implementation may help sustain the region.

Study Area

The first case study of my research is the Israel National Trail (INT) also known as Shvil Y’israel. The idea for it came from hiker Avraham Yamir. With the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI), Jewish National Fund (JNF), Israel’s Nature and Parks Authority, and the Israeli Ministry of Tourism and Education, the trail was formed after 15 years of planning (Vilnay 2010). It is approximately 620 miles, avoids areas of dispute, such as Gaza and the West Bank, and goes from the Taba border crossing in Eilat up to Kibbutz Dan in the North (Personnel TG-F). The trail has changed from when it was first created, as previously it just ran along the main highway in the Negev. However, now the trail still does change in the Negev due to the many Israel Defense Force firing zones in the region.

My main research site is Mitzpe Ramon located in the Negev region of Israel and also located along the INT. Mitzpe Ramon was founded in 1951 originally as a camp for those building route 90 in the Negev (Robinson et al 2012). It is a very small town with approximately 5,000 residents and has a very high unemployment rate along with many residents being on welfare (Rozenberg 2012). Previously Mitzpe Ramon was an industrial town, but has started to focus more on tourism recently. It has much to offer as it’s on top of the Ramon Macktesh, which is the largest in the world. Many trails, the Har Negev Nature Preserve and even Nabataean ruins are nearby. While conducting research, I volunteered at the Green Backpackers Hostel located in Mitzpe, run by hikers and sustainability enthusiasts.

The other study area of my research is the Jesus Trail, which opened in 2009 (Village to Village 2013). It is much smaller being only 65km and goes from Nazareth to Capernaum. Hikers and entrepreneurs Maoz Inon and David Landis created the trail was a strong focus of sustainability in mind. The trail allows hikers to see a variety of different holy sites for
Christians, Muslims, Jews, and Druze, and experience a relatively less traveled part of Israel (Jesus Trail Website).

My second research site was Moshav Illaniya located near the INT and on the Jesus Trail. It is a Jewish village home to about 300 residents and is about 111 years old (Personnel BW-B & Village to Village, 2013). It has ancient sites including a first century Synagogue, Olive Press, and is only about 15 minutes by car from the Galilee Sea. There I volunteered at the Yarok Az Eco-Lodge run by an ecotourism student of author Collins-Kreiner. Their guests can learn more about sustainability and permaculture while also learning new crafts such as cheese making.

Methodology

To approach my research question I used three main methods - interviews, surveys, and participant observation. My survey of 35 hikers was comprised of several sections from previously tested questions from similar studies (Pham Hong Long 2007, Collins-Kreiner 2010). They allowed me to better understand the demographics of hikers in Israel, their views on lodging, ecotourism and the various cultures along the trails. In addition, hikers ranked the types of development they would like to see and also themes of tourism, such as nature or bird watching. This follows research done by Reichel 2006, Pham Hong Long 2007 and Pizam 2006. Overall, the surveys allowed a better understanding on how tourists view ecotourism in the area and sustainability practices along both the Jesus Trail and Israel National Trail.

I also conducted 28 interviews on various personnel along the Israel National Trail and Jesus Trail including NGO, businesses personnel, trail guides, Society for Protection of Nature in Israel, and educators. The interviews were open ended discussions and I discussed questions on how the personnel viewed ecotourism and sustainability in Israel, including if there is potential for it and why or why not. In addition, I was able to better understand how the trail system works in Israel and how the personnel view the main groups of hikers (including recent Israel Defense Forces soldiers, older hikers that do small segments each month, and others). I was also able to better understand the evolution of the trails and what was being done to help tourism and battle problems such as trash along trails which the majority of the hikers I talked with complained about. This allowed me to better understand the effects tourism development and the trail has had on them along with their views towards ecotourism.
Lastly I conducted participant observation along the INT and Jesus Trail in the Galilee Region and along the INT in Mitzpe Ramon and surrounding areas. I participated at Yarok Az, an ecological organic farm doing various ecotourism activities and hiking. In addition, I explored various sites along the INT and Jesus Trail in the Galilee Region. I also worked at the Green Backpackers Hostel in Mitzpe Ramon, also hiking along the INT and participating in other ecotourism activities in the area.

**Literature**

Academics from a number of different disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, economics, geography, and more have examined literature on tourism. My research looks at tourism focusing from a geographic perspective. Many are starting to look at ecotourism as the way to go within the tourism industry, as it provides much opportunity to have a positive impact on an area whether it is from community based ecotourism or new developments. However, this is not always a positive impact and there are many issues that come along with it. This is why it is important that we also understand the stakeholder’s views on ecotourism, which have been left out in much literature. Lastly, it is important to understand the basis of trail literature as many tourism geographers have not yet examined and the problems that come with trying to make trails more sustainable.

Ecotourism is currently the fastest growing sector of tourism and has become a very hot topic issues overall within tourism (Boniface 1994, Cater 1994, Bjork 2000). The concept began back in the 1980s as people started becoming more aware of the negative impacts occurring in areas (Comescu 2007 and Honey 1999b). There is no uniform definition for ecotourism, which has created many issues. However, many use Ceballos-Lascurain’s definition,

“ecotourism is travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas” (Diamantis 1999).

Overall, this sets the platform for what ecotourism, is along with how it should have goals of creating employment, reducing leakages, and showing off traditional practices by cultures without turning it into commodification (Dufy 2002).
Stakeholders

Stakeholders are very important within ecotourism literature and can range from being the site owners, government officially, tourists, local community members, and various personnel of services in an area. If they do not properly understand how to develop a site it can have negative impacts on an area. McGahey (2012) discusses that they are also the ones responsible for understanding that sustainability of an area is key for its success. The managers and government officials typically have the most control on what type of development occurs in an area, leaving the host community to be defenseless.

Sustainability

Sustainability is, however, the strongest concept within ecotourism. Sustainability plays greatly into ecotourism itself as many goals of eco sites in tourism are 1) to have sustainable positive impacts on the host environment and its people and 2) be economically feasible for the area (Akama 2007 and Jaini 2012). Without proper implementation of sustainability, a possible loss of a beautiful environment, unique culture, and/or loss of money can occur within the area (Collins-Kreiner 2010).

Trails

There is some literature within tourism and geography about trails. As with ecotourism there are various definitions of what a trail is. Some look at it a “path used for nonmotorized travel (Eyeler et al 2008 and Mundet et al 2010). However, this does not coincide fully with the Israel National Trail since it has paths specifically for Jeeps. Trails are becoming quite popular within tourism and can be looked at as a way to help out an area’s economy, culture, and resources (Vas 2013). However, this was not until the mid-1990s when “trail tourism increased exponentially” (Maxwell 2012). This can be seen as trails such as the Inca Trail or Camino De Santiago having not just pilgrims want to come and hike but new explorers.
A major problem within trails and their development is that many were not created by professional tourism planners (Vas 2013). This is, especially true when looking at my study of the Israel National Trail. Poor management and overuse of trails is quite harmful to an area even causing degradation (Randall 2008). Some Trails have started to create policies that combat the problems such as the 2000 Inca trail Policy, which was the first major policy put in play (Maxwell 2012)

Environment Perceptions and Practices

There are many environmental issues with the Israel National Trail and the Jesus Trail. Many of these problems stem from a lack of environmental education in Israel. Many personnel believe that education of the environment should be more important for the local people along places of the trails so they better understand how their effects of construction and garbage being thrown everywhere changes the local scenery.

Water is a major issue along trails in Israel, especially in the southern Negev Region where the INT runs through and my case site of Mitzpe Ramon is located. Here there is an extreme absence of water, which makes it quite a difficult hike in areas along the INT. This has led to many not completing all sections of the INT due to this problem, as some sections go through areas where it is almost impossible to get water. There are two main ways of getting water when in the Negev desert, by water cache, or by Jeep. Many, however, do not know how to work these logistics or have the money for them.

Another major problem along Israel’s trails is with large amounts of trash, which was pointed out by majority of those interviewed and surveyed. When hiking along the INT in the south, there are not many trash cans throughout the trail as it goes through very isolated areas. This becomes a problem when hikers do not want to carry their trash all the way until their next destination, especially if it smells. This could be a positive impact from hiring a Jeep down south to bring hikers water, as they can also come and collect trash. In Mitzpe Ramon once again many blame the problem of trash to stem from a lack of environmental education as many residents were observed to throw their trash right out their windows. Up north along the Jesus Trail, 90% of hikers I spoke with made a comment on the large amounts of trash they saw along
their hike. There did appear to be a common prejudice by several stakeholders of where the trash comes on both the INT and Jesus Trail. Several individuals, such as, personnel TG-F, believe that the trash from down south comes from the hikers leaving campgrounds; some comes from Bedouin camps, “while up north it is definitely from the Arabs.”

There are stakeholders on both trails trying to combat the large amounts of trash. In Mitzpe Ramon those at the Green Backpackers hostel are working hard to try and clean up the town and inform their guests about the problem. Up North those in charge of the Jesus Trail have also made cleaning up the trail and limiting the amount of trash a main priority of theirs.

**Socio-Cultural Practices and Perceptions**

Many personnel view the government to not be helping out in tourism, especially when it comes to ecotourism development. However, there was mixed views on how the government should be involved with several wanting more money to be given to ecotourism development and areas outside of the periphery and others not wanting the government to be involved at all. The negative view of government involvement along the trails comes from the past conflict with the creation of the Gospel Trail, which is very similar to the Jesus Trail created before it. In my case site of Mitzpe Ramon, there have been several issues with corruption by local authorities that has hindered the town’s potential for tourism to grow.

Several personnel I interviewed with viewed the INT to be a great trail, but not a great tourism product. This is due to its long length making it hard to brand, no management, and logistical difficulties. Many also complained that the INT does not pass through enough different cultures, such as the Bedouins down south whom have not been treated well by the government. The lack of cultures along the INT can be seen in my surveys as none of the different cultures represented had a high percentage except for Europeans, who were hikers along the trail also. In many less developed regions “tourism has been developed and controlled by large, multinational tour companies who have little regard for local sociocultural, and economic conditions,” this however, is not the case for the Jesus Trail (Timothy, pg. 149 2002). The Jesus Trail on the other hand was created being just a short few day hike as the creators found it an easy item to market.
In addition, as they keep sustainability in mind have the trail going through as many different cultures and religions as possible up north.

**Economic Practices and Perceptions**

The final component of sustainability that I looked at is the economic aspect. This is very important within ecotourism and sustainable tourism, as the place should be made economically profitable for the locals. “It is widely assumed that tourism can help to eliminate the widening economic gap between developed and less developed countries and regions and ensure the steady acceleration of economic and social development, in particular in developing countries” (Mihalic pg. 81, 2002). However, it is difficult to calculate how much the INT and Jesus Trail has helped out Israel economically.

Personnel who I interviewed divided up INT hikers into those recently out of the Israel Defense Forces doing the entire trail at once and those doing small sections over a long period of time. The personnel have a general agreement that those doing the hike in one stretch brought in much less money to the areas they passed through. Many are setting up illegal campsites, staying at the free Trail Angels, and walking around National Parks so that they don’t have to pay their fees. In addition, the rough landscape of the south brings up many problems for hikers economically, such as the high prices they may have to pay to get water from renting a Jeep. Overall, the INT was looked at to only be economically beneficial for a select few. These included small towns that had not much more development and many grocery stores in towns such as Mitzpe Ramon. In addition, the SPNI greatly benefited from the INT as they have field schools for hikers to stay in along the trails and are the sole producer of maps for the trail, which they can sell for profit.

Overall, the Jesus Trail does appear to have a positive economic impact on the areas it goes through. This can be seen with many new lodgings opening up including Yarok Az in my case site of Illaniya and the first guesthouse in Cana. The creators of this trail identified the potential the typically poorer and less visited region of the Galilee had for a trail. Several
personnel along this trail also believe it is very important for trails to make money without being subsidized by the government, and that the profit should be invested back into the community and nature. Unlike the INT, there are actual statistics showing the contribution the trail has with around $900,000 in 2013, and in 2015 it is estimated to have an impact of $2.5 million (personnel and Jesus Trail Update). This large economic growth is expected as more people learn about the trail and also as the Jesus Trail itself expands into more communities leading to new businesses developing.

Conclusion

*Research Question: How do perceptions and practices of stakeholders on the Israel National Trail and Jesus Trail affect the sustainability of trails?*

Overall, I found that stakeholders of the INT and Jesus Trail generally recognize and understand the environmental problems along the trails as many of them can be seen just by walking a small section. Both up north and down south, areas along the trail face struggles with large amounts of trash. Down south hikers face a major problem of where they can get water, in certain sections it is only accessible by cache or Jeep. However, many can’t afford to pay for a jeep especially when hiking alone and there have been problems with theft of caching. Overall, stakeholders realized that there must be major changes occurring with ecotourism development along trails including better environmental education for not just hikers but also locals along the trails. In addition, many stakeholders identified the need for better management along the INT, possibly something modeled off of the Jesus Trail and less help from the government.

There was also a perception by many stakeholders that the INT only goes through very few cultures, which could be improved upon. On the other hand, the Jesus Trail passes through as many religious sites and different cultures as possible, which is a major component of sustainability. However, in both of my case sites personnel took action to help out the local communities as much as possible. This is seen from those in Mitzpe Ramon along the INT hiring locals and also sending guests out into the surrounding areas to see more sites. In Illaniya and along the Jesus Trail personnel also try to hire locals and buy local foods.

The INT has only benefited a select few economically: being the SPNI who make profit from their lodging and maps, along with grocery stores and small communities, especially down
South. On the other hand, the Jesus Trail has benefited many economically with many new businesses developing along the trail and bringing more tourists into a typically less visited area.

Overall, geographers need to look more at stakeholder’s perceptions as they are very important when it comes to developing sustainable tourism and having positive impacts. Tourism in Israel has been steadily increasing over the past few years and many new trails have been developed. With looking at the INT there needs to be a change in management and easier access to water for hikers down south, for it to become more popular internationally and to be more sustainable. However, thanks to those developing the Jesus Trail and various other stakeholders, such as the Green Backpackers and those at Ecotourism Israel, there is a small glimpse of hope for ecotourism development in Israel.
Executive Bibliography


Rozenberg,. Last modified Feb 07, 2012. Haaretz, "Israel's Grand Canyon town struggles to shake off sand."


Personnel-

TG= Trail Guide

BW= Business Worker