Is there a conflict between tourism and conservation? An investigation of participatory management of sea turtles in Sri Lanka

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Sea turtles play a significant role in the Sri Lankan tourism industry. There are currently two existing models of sea turtle conservation in Sri Lanka, hatchery based *ex-situ* conservation of eggs and community-based management of sea turtle nesting grounds on the Southern Coast of the island nation. The former is practiced by a few private hatcheries in the Galle district which has a high influx of tourists. Community-based conservation in Rekawa beach, Hambantota district by the Sri Lankan NGO Turtle Conservation Project (TCP) was established in 1993. Both conservation models generate their main income through sea turtle tourism (SST), volunteer programs, and guided education programs for visitors. However, the hatcheries are more influenced by tourism which has led to undesirable conservation practices such as retaining hatchlings in tanks which has a detrimental effect on the survival of hatchlings upon release. Firstly, we aim to assess the value and importance of sea turtles in attracting tourists and how SST influences conservation practices in Sri Lanka. This will be done through semi structured interviews with tourists visiting the conservation centres and by evaluating user generated content from Tripadvisor. Secondly, we will focus on a Social Network Analysis (SNA) and a discourse analysis using Q Methodology to assess the roles, interactions, and attitudes of each stakeholder involved in the two conservation models. Through these, we expect to gain insights on conflicts related to tourism and how it affects management practices, compliance to regulations, and local community participation in sea turtle conservation. Overall, this ongoing study will assist in identifying a sustainable participatory model that would ensure optimal sea turtle conservation and support local livelihood through regulated tourism.

Keywords: Sea turtles; Sea turtle tourism; Conservation conflicts; Social Network Analysis; Q Methodology