Social Sustainability: The Role of Ecotourism in Regenerating Cultural and Environmental Histories in Rio de Janeiro

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Social Sustainability: The Role of Ecotourism in Regenerating Cultural and Environmental Histories in Rio de Janeiro

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In Partial Fulfillment of a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Environmental Analysis
2016-2017 academic year, Pomona College, Claremont, California

Readers:
Professor Francisco Dóñez
Professor Zayn Kassam
Acknowledgments

First I would like to thank my thesis readers Professor Zayn Kassam and Professor Francisco Dóñez for their continual encouragement, guiding wisdom, and critical feedback throughout the thesis writing process. I would also like to thank Professor Char Miller, my unofficial reader who always provided detailed feedback and constant enthusiasm throughout the entire thesis journey.

I am extremely grateful to Pomona College for awarding me the Oldenborg International Research and Travel Grant which provided me the funding and opportunity to return to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil to conduct the interviews for my thesis research. In addition, I would like to thank Nayana Corrêa Bonamichi for assisting with transcribing my research interviews and the Academic Dean’s Office at Pomona College for providing funds to underwrite the transcription.

This thesis would not have been complete without the people who welcomed me into their communities and shared their stories with me. They continually inspire me with the important work they are doing within their communities in Brazil: Eu quero agradecer meus amigos Adilson Almeida, Otávio Barros, e Thais Pinheiro. Obrigadão!

I want to acknowledge Theresa Williamson and the exceptional work that her organization Catalytic Communities is doing in partnership with community leaders in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro. My experience writing for RioOnWatch initiated my interest in community-based ecotourism and inspired my return to Rio de Janeiro to conduct research for this thesis.

And finally, thank you to my loved ones: my friends and family that have been constant roots in my life, giving me words of encouragement and supporting me through it all.
Abstract

Ecotourism is a rapidly growing global export industry that aims to uphold the ethics of responsible tourism by engaging with local communities and encouraging environmentally conscious travel. With existing critiques of the greenwashing of ecotourism and the tendency for tourism agencies to exploit host communities, I advocate for participatory community-based models of ecotourism. This thesis explores both the material and conceptual benefits of community-based ecotourism through the critical examination of community-based ecotourism projects in Rio de Janeiro Brazil. Focusing on the implementation of ecotourism in some of Rio de Janeiro’s peripheral communities, areas that are impacted by social and spatial marginalization, this thesis argues that the cultural and environmental history of a location are inseparable. When ecotourism is participatory and community-based, it can be a method for sharing cultural and environmental knowledge. Exploring the parallels between environmental justice toxic tourism and community-based ecotourism, this thesis examines the extent to which ecotourism can be used as a tool for social justice, serving to valorize the land histories and lived experiences of communities. Beyond generating money for host communities, the case studies of participatory ecotourism demonstrate the potential for ecotourism to serve as a platform for advocating for land rights in historically marginalized communities.
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Introduction

“would you still want to travel to that country if you could not take a camera with you. -a question of appropriation”¹
Nayyirah Waheed, Salt

Driven by the passion for learning from people and places outside of what I call home, I value travel and all that it can teach me, while acknowledging that it is not something that is accessible to all. I am wary of the implications of tourism when those with the privilege to travel use their temporary occupancy in a foreign country as inspiration for their next photo opportunity, too focused on their own leisure to engage with and learn from the people and the environments playing host to their comfort.

While studying in Rio de Janeiro Brazil in the fall of 2015, I was consistently navigating my position as a student, a tourist, a researcher, and a traveler. The process of confronting the privileges associated with those positions compelled me to think more critically about what responsible tourism looks like.

Through this thesis I explore the potential for positive models of responsible tourism, focusing specifically on community-based ecotourism. As a more participatory form of tourism, community-based ecotourism allows the host community greater agency and direct involvement in the process of developing tourism in their community. This works to benefit and prioritize the needs of the community as well as generating fiscal returns that will benefit the residents directly. Without intentional collaboration with local communities, ecotourism risks the continued exploitation of the environment and the local residents. Profits and community narratives are frequently compromised when third-party for-profit ecotourism groups do not

¹ Nayyirah Waheed, Salt (United States: CreateSpace, 2013)
consult with local communities. For responsible tourism to be mutually beneficial for both tourists and the host community, careful assessment is needed to determine how profits are being distributed and the extent to which host community consent is involved in the planning and implementation processes.

Setting ecotourism within the context of some of Rio de Janeiro’s marginalized communities, this investigation of models of community-based ecotourism considers the social, cultural, and environmental conditions necessary to place control in the hands of the communities themselves. The role of favelas as informal settlements within the spatial geography of Rio de Janeiro presents a case grounded in issues of inaccessibility to public services, increased environmental burdens, and limits to agency within marginalized communities. Focusing efforts towards caring for the natural environment as an extension of residential neighborhoods, community-based ecotourism can act as a form of critical engagement and environmental education for community members and tourists. Favelas and other peripheral communities in Rio de Janeiro have implemented ecotourism projects that can be seen as positive examples of participatory tourism.

Within this research I centralize the idea that cultural and environmental histories are inseparable. In addition, I propose that the practice of developing community-based ecotourism in peripheral neighborhoods has the potential to be used as a tool for valorizing cultural and environmental histories of the land. I believe that the active inclusion of residents in ecotourism projects can allow for increased community agency and will facilitate a socially responsible practice that strengthens ties between people and the natural environment while simultaneously supporting local economies. I also argue that for historically marginalized communities,
community-based ecotourism can be used as a tool for asserting land rights and valorizing the cultural and environmental history of a place.

I acknowledge that my position as a student researcher and a tourist complicates my critique of the tourism industry in Rio de Janeiro. This investigation will be layered with my own experiences of grappling with being a foreigner participating in the tourism industry while conducting this research about it. My understanding of the history, urban dynamics, and social and spatial divides in Rio de Janeiro was greatly facilitated by my involvement as a journalist with the non-profit organization Catalytic Communities. The organization works directly with the city’s informally settled communities known as favelas, sharing the narratives of favela residents through a news platform designed to center their perspectives. While working with Catalytic Communities during my semester abroad and in the summer of 2016 I wrote articles for the online news platform RioOnWatch, covering events and community-based projects related to environmental justice and sustainability. The process of reporting on community-based ecotourism initiatives served as some of the initial inspiration for this research.

I am aware that favelas and other peripheral communities are frequent subjects of academic research and popular media exposés and can be exploited in the process. Communities are sometimes wary of international researchers entering their communities, taking the stories and data they need, leaving and publishing a paper, and never sharing their insights with the communities they studied.² I want to be conscious of how I present these communities in my research because I want to do justice to the narratives of the community members I have talked to. To break this cycle of exploitative research I aim to maintain communication with my

contacts in Rio de Janeiro and share my research findings with them, with the hope that the models of ecotourism discussed in this thesis can serve as inspiration for other organizers hoping to develop community-based ecotourism.

The first chapter will present a history of the city of Rio de Janeiro with a specific focus on peripheral communities, areas which experience disproportionate social and spatial marginalization and stigma. The second chapter examines existing literature on the ecotourism industry, addressing common critiques and drawing parallels between ecotourism and other educational forms of tourism such as environmental justice toxic tours. The chapter will also address issues of accessibility and rights to the city, serving to contextualize some of the urban dynamics influencing the development of ecotourism in Rio de Janeiro. The next chapter presents three case study models for working with community-based ecotourism in Rio de Janeiro. This section is based on interviews I conducted with community leaders and third-party partners actively developing unique participatory tourism projects. The fourth chapter is an examination of the larger implications of community-based ecotourism, the applicability of these models of responsible tourism, and a critical reflection on the role and responsibility of the tourist when traveling and engaging with host communities.

I hope that the material presented is informative and inspires those of us who have the opportunity to travel to think critically about the forms of tourism and travel we participate in, the impact our travel has on the people and the environment at our destination, and what the value of travel is for each of us.
Chapter 1
A History of Rio de Janeiro’s Divided Landscape

Rio de Janeiro is a city of divides. Polarizing social, spatial, racial, and environmental extremes characterize the city, which have made it a favorite site of both tourism and academic research. In a city where disparity manifests in the visible landscape and social dynamics, it is easy for media representations to amplify the positive and negative extremes. This is very much the case with media depictions and internationally assumed stereotypes about Rio de Janeiro. It is telling that common responses to my decision to study abroad in Brazil were those of worried concern and warnings about the danger that would most certainly await me in a place made infamous by movies like *City of God* and *Elite Squad*, where intense gun violence and drug trafficking characterize the city. However, this is a city that cannot be defined by singular representations.

In this initial chapter I present a brief history of Rio de Janeiro to offer some insight into the complexity of this city, focusing on the formation of peripheral communities like *favelas* and *quilombos* and the legacies that accompany Brazil’s prominent role in the Transatlantic slave trade. This chapter also sets the scene for later discussions of ecotourism in the context of Rio de Janeiro as a megacity with the world’s largest urban forests. We must first understand the city’s history to recognize the position of communities on the margins within this environment. The development of community-based ecotourism projects in peripheral communities becomes a response to the residual effects of a city built from and on inequality.

Media portrayals of Rio de Janeiro often fluctuate between a selective focus on images of beaches, beauty, and luxury or images of violence and crime. Among the common images that

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come to mind when referencing Rio de Janeiro are the colorful costumes of Carnival, crowds of people dancing to the irresistible beat of samba music, the panoramic views from the Christ statue, and the famous Copacabana and Ipanema beaches. These images portray the city as one of exotic leisure. Other representations may relate to violence, drugs, crime, and densely populated hillsides brimming with houses that form the communities known as favelas. While aspects of all of these representations reflect some of the city’s dynamics, Rio de Janeiro’s complexity is very much rooted in social and racial inequality that manifests in spatial segregation and a landscape of stark disparities in power, wealth, and race. For a more comprehensive perspective on Rio de Janeiro, we need a lens that acknowledges the extremes while focusing on the complexity of all the qualities in between.

Favelas are a principal location where you can see some of these intertwined subjects at work. The origins of favelas are closely tied to Brazil’s role as a dominant importer in the Transatlantic slave trade. Brazil imported five million enslaved Africans between 1501 and 1875, ten times the amount that arrived in the United States and Canada. Over two million enslaved Africans arrived in the Port of Rio de Janeiro alone. In 1888, Brazil abolished slavery, the last country in the western hemisphere to do so. Influenced by a necessity for housing for formerly

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4 See Map 2 in Appendix
5 In this thesis I refer to favelas using their Portuguese name or the word “community,” but they will never be labeled as slums. The ascribed, often negative, assumptions about slums are then projected onto these communities, a connotation that implies uniform squalor, poverty, and instability. To avoid contributing further to the stigma associated with favelas, I am intentionally prioritizing their original Portuguese name in my writing.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
enslaved Africans, the proliferation of *favelas* occurred a decade after emancipation. At the time, Rio de Janeiro was a city with increasing numbers of people and not enough existing housing infrastructure. The first *favela*, Morro da Providência\(^\text{10}\) or Providence Hill, was established in Rio de Janeiro in 1897.\(^\text{11}\) Providência was settled by veterans of the intense Canudos war in the northeast of Brazil.\(^\text{12}\) As compensation for their war efforts, the army had originally promised veterans land in Rio de Janeiro, the capital at the time.\(^\text{13}\) Upon arrival in Rio they found that their promised land was nonexistent. In response they began a squatter settlement up on the hill that became the first *favela*.\(^\text{14}\) Recently freed, formerly enslaved Africans also in search for housing joined the original squatters in Providência, establishing a community that has become a significant location in Afro-Brazilian history in Rio de Janeiro.\(^\text{15}\)

Today, less than 130 years after slavery was abolished, the residual effects of slavery are still apparent in the city’s social and spatial dynamics. With 1.5 million people living in approximately 1,000 *favelas*, these residents make up an estimated 24% of the population of the city of Rio de Janeiro.\(^\text{16}\) The racial demographics of *favelas* illustrate the city’s spatial segregation. While black people make up 53 percent of the national population, in *favelas* the

\(^{10}\) The origin of the word *favela* comes from the name of a plant that grew on the hills in the northeast of Brazil. Before becoming Providência, the first *favela* settlement in Rio de Janeiro was originally named “Morro da Favela” translating to Favela Hill.\(^\text{11}\)


\(^{12}\) Ibid.


\(^{15}\) Ibid.

percentage rises to 67 percent. In wealthier South Zone areas of the city near the beaches, the residential demographics are upwards of 90% white (with white referring to Brazilians with European ancestry). These residential areas not classified as favelas are often referred to as the asfalta, translating to “the asphalt.” Visually, the social and racial divide is apparent on the city’s skyline, with fancy high-rise apartments decorating the beachfront while the rising hills behind them are densely covered with smaller-scale homes.

Each favela is unique, though some qualities are often shared between these communities. Favela communities usually consist of densely populated low-rise homes, built by hand and family maintained for generations. These neighborhoods are usually “mixed use”, consisting of an assortment of homes above stores and restaurants. The proximity of residential and community social spaces generates an active community network of frequent interaction and familiarity amongst residents.

With their origins as squatter settlements, favelas are considered a form of informal housing. As a result, these communities are not always guaranteed access to public services like sewage systems and garbage collection. Of the 30 percent of Rio’s population that is not connected to formal sanitation systems, some live in favelas while others who do not have access live in wealthier neighborhoods. Housing rights is an issue that confronts the city as a whole, but has very serious implications for residents of favelas. As informal settlements, favela residents have squatter’s rights, a phrase that is associated with the concept of adverse possession. Adverse possession allows a person who has occupied land for a certain amount of

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18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
uninterrupted time rights to file for land ownership. While the time frame for adverse possession is often 10 to 15 years, Article Five of the Brazilian Federal Constitution states that in urban areas after five years a person can file for land claims of up to 250 square meters. In the case of favelas, the community would file a collective lawsuit to claim the official title to their land. Assuming the lawsuit is approved, the community would become the legal owner of their land. However, these legal processes can be time consuming and challenging, and not all favelas can claim official land rights. These communities remain subject to housing insecurity with threats of eviction because of government needs for land and their tenuous claims to land. These adverse possession claims do not imply that the government supports their existence or provides basic public services for these communities. In preparation for international mega sporting events and with the construction of new infrastructure for the 2016 Olympics Games, thousands of families have been removed from their homes; as of July 2015, the government evicted more than 77, 2016 people. Due to their complex claims to land rights, favelas have been targets of these forced evictions.

Another form of peripheral communities are quilombos, which have their own unique history as informal settlements. Quilombos were originally established by runaway slaves and have traditionally housed residents of African descent, known as quilombolas. This quilombola identity can be equated to that of a maroon, a title used to refer to Africans who escaped slavery

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22 Ibid.
in the Americas and then formed their own settlements. One of the three case studies in Chapter
Three is the Quilombo do Camorim, a community that shares in this history as a quilombo.
While favelas are the commonly known communities on the margins, it is important to
distinguish the unique history that is associated with quilombos. While they both may share in
experiences of marginalization and lack of government support, using the term favela to refer to
quilombos would erase part of the rich history of Afro-Brazilian culture in these communities.

Rio de Janeiro’s geographic landscape is unique. The city is highly urbanized, yet
contains densely forested areas intermixed with the build environment. It is home to the world’s
two largest urban forests: The Pedra Branca State Park and the Tijuca Forest. Pedra Branca
covers 10 percent of the municipality of Rio and is four times the size of the Tijuca Forest.25
These two forests are home to the Atlantic Forest biome which is characterized by moist tropical
and subtropical temperatures and a high level of biodiversity. Part of Rio de Janeiro’s attraction
as a tourist destination is due to the abundance of trails and outdoor recreation activities.
Ecotourism is one such activity that has capitalized upon the presence of these expansive urban
rainforests. In some areas of the city, the forest surrounds or abuts favela neighborhoods,
facilitating the residents’ access to their trails and open space. Two of the communities that I
focus on in this thesis have intimate relationships with the forests that boarder or encompass their
communities. This physical proximity to a forested environment has facilitated the development
of ecotourism and has served as a resource for the local residents.

Understanding the history of favelas and quilombos as marginalized peripheral spaces
within the city of Rio de Janeiro is necessary for the upcoming discussions of agency, resilience,

Question Removals Planned by INEA,” RioOnWatch.org, February 4, 2013,
and preservation within the context of ecotourism. The following chapter will present an overview of existing literature on ecotourism as an industry and the principal critiques of the ethics of this practice in preparation for contextualizing community-based ecotourism in Rio de Janeiro.
Chapter 2
The Ethics of Ecotourism

Tourism is a rapidly growing global export industry. According to The United Nations World Tourism Organization, the tourism sector amounts to nine percent of the global GDP. As of 2015, the tourism industry accounts for one in every eleven jobs, supporting 284 million people globally. As an export industry, tourism profits from the exportation of an experience for the traveler, marketing a place and its people for the leisure and enjoyment of tourists. With increasing trends in international travel over the years, responsible tourism practices like “green travel” and ecotourism have gained popularity. This chapter focuses on the various ways ecotourism has been defined, common critiques of its practice, the value of community-based ecotourism, and urban development theory that engages with issues of inclusion and (in)accessibility of the city, serving to contextualize urban ecotourism in Rio de Janeiro. The chapter introduces a critical parallel between environmental justice toxic tourism and community-based ecotourism.

What is Ecotourism?

While all forms of tourism should strive to be responsible and ethical, ecotourism is included alongside geotourism, pro-poor tourism, responsible tourism, and sustainable tourism as a practice characterized by ethical principles. With its growing popularity, there is increasing

debate on what constitutes ecotourism as a practice and industry. Though less studied than the broader tourism industry, existing literature defines ecotourism in various ways. According to The International Ecotourism Society, ecotourism is “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people.”\textsuperscript{29} The same organization posits the following principles as necessary when situating ecotourism activities in a host location:

- minimize impact
- build environmental and cultural awareness and respect
- provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts
- provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people
- raise sensibility to host countries’ political, environmental, and social climate.\textsuperscript{18}

Many of these criteria are reflected in other early writing on ecotourism. One of the first people to coin the term ecotourism in 1983 was Mexican architect Hector Ceballos-Lascuráin:

Ecotourism is that tourism that involves travelling to relatively undisturbed natural areas with the specific object of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural aspects (both past and present) found in these areas. Ecotourism implies a scientific, aesthetic or philosophical approach, although the ‘ecotourist’ is not required to be a professional scientist, artist or philosopher. The main point is that the person who practices ecotourism has the opportunity of immersing him or herself in nature in a way that most people cannot enjoy in their routine, urban existences. This person will eventually acquire an awareness and knowledge of the natural environment, together with its cultural aspects, that will convert him into somebody keenly involved in conservation issues.\textsuperscript{30}


Ecotourism engages with nature in a critical way to provide positive experiences and benefits for the tourists and the host community. To supplement existing criteria for ecotourism, Cater (1993) suggests the following qualities as critical when developing sustainable tourism:

- Meets the needs of the host population in terms of improved living standards both in the short and long term
- Satisfy the demands of a growing number of tourists and continue to attract them in order to meet the first aim
- Safeguard the natural environment in order to achieve both of the preceding aims. Beyond merely encouraging people to vacation in “untouched” or less-developed environments to enjoy the beauty and biodiversity of a landscape, ecotourism has an educational and critical-thinking component that encourages visitors to learn from the natural environment and local communities they engage with. As will be later discussed, community-based ecotourism is often considered a prime example of how to facilitate tourism that is mutually beneficial for all parties involved.

Ecotourism activities can take on a variety of forms. An ecotourism experience is often place-specific but can include hikes, visits to nature preserves, community tours or general travel to environments removed from often urbanized spaces. Ceballos-Lascuráin provides additional details on how ecotourism functions in practice: “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

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and present) found in these areas.”32 While these are the practical aspects that define ecotourism, the intent and implementation of ecotourism in a host location are principle areas of critique and skepticism when assessing the ethics and responsibility of ecotourism.

**Common Critiques and Risks of Ecotourism**

Though many of the core definitions of ecotourism acknowledge the importance of responsibility and mutual benefits for both the tourists and the local host community, ecotourism has been heavily criticized for its tendency to be exploitative and disruptive to a host environment and its residents. Additionally, there are issues of privilege and accessibility linked to the ecotourism industry. While developing countries often host ecotourism because they have larger areas of preserved natural space, local populations can rarely participate in eco tours due to the high cost that is intended for foreign tourists. Ecotourism projects can be susceptible to catering *only* to those with the social capital to travel, rather than acknowledging the needs of the host community. The dangers of ecotourism can play out in the behavior of the tourists themselves when they do not consider the long-term impact of their vacation on the host environment and instead perceive their travel as a solution for experiencing foreign environments in a way that is “green” and environmentally conscious. As Cater (1993) warns: “there is a very real danger of viewing ecotourism as the universal panacea, and the ecotourist as some magic breed, mitigating all tourism’s ills. It is vital that a critical appraisal be made of the sustainability of ecotourism.”33

Ecotourism has been an especially desirable practice in the world’s less developed countries that are rich in natural preserves and less urbanized landscapes. Yet this poses another potential risk—intensifying land degradation: “As the emphasis is on visiting unspoiled natural environments, previously remote areas with delicately balanced socio-cultural and physical regimes are drawn into the locus of international tourism. These areas are consequently all the more susceptible to environmental degradation and socio-cultural disruption.”\textsuperscript{34}

Ecotourism in less developed countries can then place extra burdens on these areas that may not have established environmental management infrastructure:

The low level of development of such nations precludes them from being able to afford environmental protection measures, whether they prevent, ameliorate or restore degradation. It is also patently unfair that they should bear the costs of such measures, the need for which arises from the fact that ecotourism to Third World countries is essentially exploiting their environmental carrying capacity.\textsuperscript{35}

These risks can increase if ecotourism without the consent of the local community in the host location. If ecotourism is developed with the intent of generating profits for a third-party ecotourism company without any of the profits returning back to or being shared with the host community, this is a recipe for exploitation. If land degradation and the agency of local communities are in jeopardy, ecotourism is not upholding its promise of “ethical and responsible” tourism. This makes ecotourism ventures that are specifically created with a participatory community-base an important direction for the ecotourism industry.

\textit{The Value of Community-based Ecotourism}

Community-based, locally designed ecotourism projects have the potential to bring revenue directly to host communities. The World Wildlife Foundation defines community-based


\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
ecotourism as “a form of ecotourism where the local community has substantial control over, and involvement in, its development and management, and a major proportion of the benefits remain within the community.”

Community-based ecotourism can be a positive counter to the tendencies for exploitative and environmentally damaging forms of ecotourism that lack communication between an ecotourism agency and the people living in the host location. The development of ecotourism projects that are initiated at the desire of residents and are implemented according to the priorities and best interests of the host community and local environment is an ideal form of ecotourism. The case studies presented in the next chapter will provide concrete examples of how community-based ecotourism can be successfully conducted and what is involved in the processes of developing participatory models of ecotourism.

Rights to the City in a Landscape of Disparity

Rio de Janeiro’s residential urban areas are located within and around the densely forested and mountainous geography. While most definitions of ecotourism describe environmentally conscious leisure activities that provide an escape from an urban environment, studying ecotourism in a built environment is a particular approach that will be explored through the case studies in this thesis. To recognize why ecotourism in an urban environment is unique, it is important to have an understanding of the urban dynamics of development. Situating ecotourism within this context introduces the issues of land rights for marginalized communities, access to outdoor recreation, and rights to the city.

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37 Participatory ecotourism refers to the direct inclusion of members of the host community in the planning and implementation processes of ecotourism in and around their community.
Rio de Janeiro is the perfect example of an urban environment that has social and spatial divides that put into question whether all residents truly are treated like citizens that have full access to the city. Written into Brazil’s 2001 Statute of the City, the “right to the city” is recognized as a participatory approach to urban planning and inclusivity. The concept of “rights to the city” originated in the writing of French sociologist Henri Lefebvre, who coined the phrase to capture who was to access urban life. His writing explores the “right to nature” as well and the connections with leisure, tourism, and access to nature:

The right to nature entered into social practice thanks to leisure, having made its way through protestations becoming commonplace against noise, fatigue, the concentrationary universe of cities (as cities are rotting or exploding). A strange journey indeed! Nature enters into exchange value and commodities, to be bought and sold. This 'naturality' which is counterfeit and traded in, is [in fact] destroyed by commercialized, industrialized and institutionally organized leisure pursuits. 'Nature,' or what passes for it, and survives of it, becomes the ghetto of leisure pursuits, the separate place of pleasure and the retreat of 'creativity' [...] In the face of this pseudo-right to nature, the right to the city is like a cry and a demand. The right slowly meanders through the surprising detours of nostalgia and tourism, the return to the heart of the traditional city, and the call of existent or recently developed centralities. The claim to nature, and the desire to enjoy it displace the right to the city. This latest claim [the right to nature] expresses itself indirectly as a tendency to flee the deteriorated and unrenovated city, alienated urban life before at last, 'really' living [...] The right to the city cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities. It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life.

Within the history of Rio de Janeiro, land rights, access to the city, and the tendency for marginalized communities to be ascribed second-class citizenship are dynamics that shape the versions of the city that are marketed for international tourists. When considering issues of (in)validation of periphery communities, their inclusion or exclusion from the vision of the city

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presented to the public influences the validity of asserting “rights to the city” in Brazil’s city statute.

An additional concept that defines the marketed version of Rio de Janeiro that is presented for international tourists is the phrase “para inglês ver”, translating to “for the English to see”. The phrase “para inglês ver” is commonly used in reference to governmental policies or projects that falsely advertise and market Brazil in a way that is favorable and designed to present a specific image of the country for foreigners:

A “para inglês ver” (PIV) law, policy or project is one which, from the outside, appears to address a problem, but which in practice is merely a superficial change, a temporary fix or public relations exercise intended to appease community interests and appeal to domestic and international public opinion. It does little to benefit those it purports to help, either because implementation on a well-designed policy is poorly conducted and easily corruptible, or because it is actually designed for political motives rather than social or philanthropic ones.  

The ways Brazil and Rio de Janeiro specifically are marketed for international tourists plays into these dynamics of the “para inglês ver” policies. Hosting community-based ecotourism in this urban environment of evident spatial marginalization will be visualized in the subsequent chapter.

Marketing the Poor: ‘Slum Tours’ and Poverty Tourism

Tourism that capitalizes off the experiences of often marginalized communities has questionable ethics. Tourism in favelas is a prime example of how the lived experiences of favelados are packaged and catered to the international tourist. The framing, participatory processes, and intent behind hosting tourism in impoverished areas are crucial determinants of the ethics of this tourism. While in Rio de Janeiro in 2015, I saw public ads for slum tourism that

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consisted of a tourism agency taking “gringos” in safari-type jeeps through the hilly, windy streets of the city’s favelas. These types of tourism are disengaged from the local community and serve to bring profit to an outside party that is capitalizing off of tourists’ assumed stereotypes and curiosities about favelas in a way that does not give voice to the lived experiences of residents.41

The issue with favela tourism is not necessarily the location, but the intent and execution of the tourism in that environment. There is value in providing people who do not live in favelas the opportunity to experience those communities first hand to disprove or supplement the assumptions often created by media about these communities. However, it is only justifiable to host tourism in favelas when there is participation and interest from the host community, otherwise it is an exploitative experience.

Toxic Tourism as a Tool for Justice

Toxic tourism in an environmental justice context is tourism that involves visiting communities that have been disproportionately impacted by air pollution, are sited near toxic facilities, are identified as food deserts, and/or often have higher rates of health issues caused by environmentally unjust living conditions. Within the American framework of environmental justice, organizations like Communities for a Better Environment organize toxic tours which include “visits to oil refineries, ports, metal recycling facilities and other sources that are linked to asthma, birth defects, and cancer.”42 There is an educational purpose to these tours, insuring that participants “will hear personal stories of local residents struggling to hold industry and

government officials accountable for toxic pollution in their neighborhoods.” Once informed, those visitors can draw connections between the site-specific problems addressed on the tour and similar issues occurring on a national or global scale.

Toxic tours serve in part to educate individuals about the conditions of a place that is not their home, but they are also a form of political engagement that serves to question the larger systemic issues that create spaces of environmental injustice.

Toxic tours are one education and political tool that many community organizations use to tell their stories and promote face-to-face, personal connections. Environmental justice activists hope that these brief snapshots of the daily realities of people struggling with the devastation of toxic pollution will move beyond merely “opening one’s eyes” and toward positive action to help change the unjust social and environmental conditions witnessed on the tour.

With toxic tours typically sited in low-income communities of color, it is easy to label this work as empowerment work that fully solves the education gap between the general public’s understanding of the lived experiences of environmental justice communities. There are implications for assuming toxic tourism is an all-encompassing solution for positive change:

Referring to the toxic tour as a political “tool” for change that should benefit the host communities…it must be used cautiously, it should not “turn the communities into parks” that tour groups are perennially passing through. Furthermore…the issues of who controls the agenda and whose interests are being served are paramount; visitors have a certain responsibility to give something back to the community.

45 Ibid.
While it is necessary to be wary of the ways in which community-based tourism is applauded as a tool for social change, there is value in framing this form of tourism as a method of generating profits for the community in a form other than monetary compensation.

**Drawing Parallels between Ecotourism and Toxic Tourism**

Comparisons can be made between environmental justice toxic tourism and community-based ecotourism. Both practices use the environmental conditions of a place to facilitate the education of visitors in a way that compels tourists to think critically about the environment they are experiencing.

Although an American environmental justice framework cannot be directly applicable to ecotourism in Brazil, there are undeniable commonalities between the intent and implementation of toxic tours and community-based eco tours. “Like all tourism, ecotourism aims to provide direct access into another’s world, to gain a deeper involvement with other peoples and other places…Eco tour packages promote the idea that you can do something to protect the environment while on vacation, maybe even “join a local grassroots conservation group.”

Similarly, there is undeniable value in providing people an opportunity to learn and engage with issues of environmental justice through an intimate and tangible experience of a toxic tour.

**The Importance of Place in Geographies of Inequality**

‘Natural’ environments are not immune to the effects of history and sociopolitical influences. It is no coincidence that low-income communities of color are frequently sited on

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undesirable land, far removed from fresh food and basic services. It is not random chance that these communities are located in close proximity to the detrimental effects of toxic waste facilities and air pollution of highways and shipping yards. Within an American context, histories of redlining and spatial segregation have created these environments of inequality. When inequalities are written into an environment, land can never be detached from the histories of struggle that shape them. “A geography of environmental inequality produced by the communities that are suffering these injustices inspires a reconstructed sense of place, in fact, a global sense of place that embraces an intercultural understanding of common struggles and shared futures.”

It is clear the physical environmental conditions of a place cannot be separated from the sociopolitical and cultural history of the land and its people. With the legacies of land and the people that have historically populated it, community-based activism becomes the option for combating environmental injustice in spaces with deeply engrained cultural and environmental history. Writing on the political role of toxic tourism in the context of American history Di Chiro says:

A politics of place, for many communities of color in the EJM, very often means fighting to protect environments in cities or rural areas that have been abandoned, neglected, contaminated, used as dumping grounds for all manner of waste, and written off as wastelands by government and corporate officials. Most environmental justice activists do not have easy access to mobility out of a contaminated neighborhood, nor do they automatically expect the state or corporate sector to relocate them in the unlikely event of successful legal action. Moreover, many communities do not necessarily want to be relocated, as in the case of Native American or Chicano communities; historical ties to the land, or the connection to the places of residence that some African Americans feel as descendants of the freed slaves who had built these communities from the ground up.


48 Environmental Justice Movement.
Many community activists in the EJM stay where they are and reclaim their landscapes in positive terms.\textsuperscript{49}

In a similar form, community-based ecotourism that is sited in socially and spatially marginalized communities can serve as empowerment by using land histories to bring awareness to challenges facing these communities. Integral to the practices of community-based ecotourism and toxic tourism is the importance of place and site-specific social and environmental conditions. In the following chapter, the three case studies address the importance of place and history in relation to the development of community-oriented tourism projects.

Chapter 3
Community-based Ecotourism Projects in Action

This chapter focuses on what socially responsible ecotourism can look like by presenting specific models of ecotourism that have the potential to better engage host communities.

I began my research with the hopes of gathering interviews that would help determine what a single replicable model of responsible ecotourism would look like. The intention was to present concrete examples of projects that serve as positive examples of ecotourism working to benefit local communities rather than further contributing to exploitative tendencies of some ecotourism companies. I went into many of the interviews with the mindset that a single model of socially responsible ecotourism exists. In the interviews I asked questions about the process of establishing community-based ecotourism projects and what characteristics of the projects ensured long-term sustainability. However, through the process of speaking with resident tour guides and individuals involved in the community-based tourism industry, I realized that I was asking the wrong questions. My respondents’ answers made it clear that there was no single model of responsible tourism. This conclusion was confirmed when each of the interviewees contextualized their answers to my questions within narratives of cultural and place-based environmental history. The interviewees focused their responses on the specific history of the land and the community hosting ecotourism, proving that place is a core factor in developing and sustaining ecotourism projects over time. When introducing ecotourism into a community, the project works within the existing environment of a place and is inseparable from the history of the land.

The interviews in the next section discuss ecotourism in relation to various themes, including resilience in the face of struggles for land rights, valorization of marginalized and
stigmatized histories, expanding societal perceptions of periphery communities, and place-based ecotourism as cultural and environmental education.

**Research methods**

The case studies in this chapter are based in Rio de Janeiro where I spent the months of June and July 2016 conducting qualitative interviews with community tour guides, resident organizers, and an independent community-based tourism company. The original interviews were conducted entirely in Portuguese and audio recorded. Each of the three case study interviews lasted approximately an hour. For consistency and accessibility for an English-speaking audience, the interviews were transcribed and translated into English.

The three case studies presented in this chapter include the communities of Quilombo do Camorim and Vale Encantado, which have implemented ecotourism projects, and the third is the tourism agency Conectando Territórios which facilitates community-based tourism in traditional communities and quilombos.

In addition to interviewing the community leaders and organizers working with community-based tourism, my research involved observational information collected when I participated on eco tours in both Quilombo do Camorim and Vale Encantado. Having the opportunity to take part on tours led by community leaders was a critical part of assessing these projects in my role as both a researcher and a tourist.

This chapter will include the narratives and responses from my conversations with the three interviewees. The quotes included in the following section were selected and translated myself. All of the interviewees have given me verbal and written permission to include and publish portions of their answers to my questions. Their personal accounts are the core of this
research and I intend to do their narratives justice by presenting this chapter as a platform for sharing their lived experiences.

The following questions guided the three case study interviews I conducted:

- Can you talk about your earliest memories in your community, what was it like in the past?
- How many community members are involved in the ecotourism project?
- When was the ecotourism project first initiated in your community?
- How do community members respond to having tourists frequent your neighborhood doing these eco tours?
- Who is the target audience for your ecotourism? Is it typically foreigners or Brazilians as well?
- How do you define social sustainability?
- With the approaching Summer 2016 Olympics do you think more people will be visiting your community?
- Do you have any expectations for how your ecotourism project will be influenced by the Olympics in Rio?
- For people who do not live in your community, what is the most important thing you would like them to know about your community?
Introducing the Interviewees

*Adilson Almeida: President of the Cultural Association of the Quilombo do Camorim and Guias da Natureza Tour Guide*

Upon visiting the Quilombo do Camorim, it is evident that the community’s cultural history cannot be separated from the natural environment in which it is set within. Located in the neighborhood of Jacarepaguá in the West Zone of Rio de Janeiro, near the Olympic Park, the Quilombo do Camorim borders the vast Pedra Branca State Park.  

Visitors to the community pass along a main road lined with a series of recently built condominiums before arriving in the center of the community where the streets become tree-lined and densely forested. As a community originally established by runaway slaves, the cultural history of the *quilombo* plays a central role in many of the community’s social and environmental initiatives and projects. My

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50 See Map 1 in the appendix.
initial contact with the Quilombo do Camorim was as a participant on one of the hikes Adilson Almeida leads through the Pedra Branca Forest as part of the community ecotourism project.

With the community’s location within the dense Pedra Branca forest, it was fitting that my interview with Adilson took place at a mossy picnic table in the midst of the lush green forest. We spent an hour talking about the community’s ecotourism project, the quilombo’s cultural activities, and the general history of Adilson’s community. As President of the Cultural Association of the Quilombo do Camorim, Adilson is involved in all of the quilombo’s cultural and environmental initiatives. He is also a tour guide and one of the core organizers of the community’s ecotourism project called Guias da Natureza (Nature Guides). In addition to being the founder and president of the community association, he is a mestre or teacher of capoeira, a traditional Brazilian martial arts practice. Adilson’s dedication to the cultivation of cultural knowledge and community engagement are evident in the pride and passion with which he talks about the history and the environment that have shaped his community. After hearing Adilson’s stories about growing up in his forested community and having an extremely close connection to nature, it was wonderful have our conversation in an environment that he considers sacred.
Otávio Barros: Tour Guide and President of the Vale Encantado Resident’s Association

Situated within the Alto Boa Vista region of the dense Tijuca forest, the small community of Vale Encantado is surrounded by lush green forest and overlooks the distant beaches and lagoons in the West Zone of the city. Tucked away in a densely forested area, a single road leads up to the small residential community. Due to its remote location within the large urban city of Rio, it is a hidden gem of the Alto Boa Vista area of the city.

When I visited the community of Vale Encantado to interview Otávio in July 2016 it was the third time I had been to Vale Encantado. My first visit had been during my semester abroad in fall 2015. My initial experience in the community was as a participant on one of the hikes

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51 See Map 1 in the appendix.
that Otávio leads as part of the community’s ecotourism project. Our hike took us through the residential part of the community, then followed a trail through the forest with Otávio describing the biodiversity we saw along the path and talking about the origins of Vale Encantado. Unique to Vale Encantado’s ecotourism project is the combination of hikes through the natural environment paired with a locally sourced homemade lunch hosted at the restaurant in the community’s cooperative building. Not only do tourists have the opportunity to learn about local biodiversity on the hike, but they also receive a unique opportunity to eat locally produced food, gaining a richer educational experience about the community.

Having experienced the hike and lunch aspects of the ecotourism project first hand, my interview with Otávio proved to be valuable for learning more about the process of creating the ecotourism project and the challenges along the way.

**Thais Pinheiro: Founder of Conectando Territórios**

Unlike the past two interviews which were conducted in the midst of forested areas of the city, my conversation with Thais took place in a noisy café in a busy neighborhood near the center of the city. Thais and I sat at a tiny table having an hour and a half long conversation in Portuguese about responsible tourism, environmental racism, and social justice issues in the United States and Brazil. Thais began her studies in Environmental Analysis and has since gone on to study Social Memory and develop her own tourism agency (Conectando Territórios/Connecting Territories) that works to encourage socially responsible tourism in traditional communities in Brazil.

Thais understands that the role of Conectando Territórios as a third-party agency is to facilitate tourism in traditional communities that have rich land histories such as quilombos,
favelas, and indigenous communities. She finds value in tourism projects that are community
generated and highly participatory. Seeking out existing tourism projects in communities that are
not generally on the radar of tourist itineraries, Thais’ tourism agency connects tourists with
these communities. Her perspective as a third-party agency working with community-based
ecotourism is extremely valuable for this research.

Interview Themes:

What’s in a name? History written into a place

Names carry stories and intergenerational knowledge. Sharing the meaning behind the
name of a place can open up a conversation about the implications of colonization, transference,
and possession of land. In my interviews with community leaders in Vale Encantado and
Quilombo do Camorim, I asked about what their communities were like in the past, a question
that sparked conversation about the rich histories of how their communities originated and the
peoples that have left their impact on the land.

Adilson discussed the indigenous history of his community’s land, acknowledging that
while the legacy of the Transatlantic slave trade is evident in Afro-Brazilian culture of his family
and community, other people lived off of the same land before them.

The name “Camorim” is indigenous, it wasn’t Salvador Correia de Sá that made it up. The name already existed because the Tamoios and Tupinambás indigenous groups already lived here. At the time when they fished and hunted there was a fish called “bass”, a fish considered noble because it came from the sea to the lagoon (it entered the sea from the Camorim river where we are). It is here where the Camorim River begins, due to the waterfalls, and goes to the Central River Lake and empties into the ocean. This fish came here so the indigenous peoples did not need to leave and go to the ocean or the lake to fish. Many indigenous people lived around here and fished big fish. The fish is scientifically known as “Seabass” today, in the past it was called “Camorim” (the name given by the indigenous peoples) and this [name] stayed. They left and added the name
enganho in addition to Camorim. It has thus stayed as “Engenho do Camorim” as it is known today.\textsuperscript{52}

The active remembering of the indigenous communities that lived off of the land before escaped slaves established the quilombo community is part of Adilson’s practice of searching for his ancestral origins and his community’s origins. This knowledge is incorporated into the history of the environment that he shares along the trail during the hikes. In the case of Vale Encantado, Otávio explains how the history of the community’s name reflects the influence of foreign entities prior to tourism becoming a central project of this community.

Vale Encantado has this name because of a real estate development in the 1960s, which opened in 1973. The name of this project was “Enchanted Valley.” An American company would build several buildings and a club (which would be the recreation area of these buildings), but the work did not “move forward” (just as well, because having these buildings all here in the Valley would be a very major ecological disaster). It just got this name because it was already known by many people coming from other regions to visit a traditional bar, Vale Encantado, that was very fashionable in the 1980s and 1990s. Its name was “Enchanted Valley”, so we use the name “Vale Encantado” (translated into Portuguese). The old name here in the region where we are was “Taquara”. Many of the old people still know it as “Taquara.”

So, we preferred to keep it as “Vale Encantado” not to have more trouble with tourism, to get here to Vale Encantado. This was one motive for the name “Vale Encantado”. The community itself came here after the coffee plantation (around 1870 and 1880) with the Carvalho family, a traditional family that, despite being in the Vale Encantado, are very reserved, very isolated and hardly mix with residents. They still talk today, we have parties and they participate (the children), but the older ones (who are now deceased) did not mix with the other families.\textsuperscript{53}

In addition to “Enchanted Valley” being a name that accurately describes the beauty of this secluded community, Otávio’s commentary on the practicality of retaining a name adopted from an American company’s influence on adjacent land speaks to the logistics of accessibility. While Vale Encantado is not the original name that older generations of the community prefer, keeping

\textsuperscript{52} Adilson Almeida in conversation with the author, July 2016.
\textsuperscript{53} Otávio Barros in conversation with the author, July 2016.
a more well-known name benefits the rather isolated community’s ability to market itself to tourists who are otherwise unfamiliar with the area. The adoption of Vale Encantado’s name speaks to the impact left by the American company, but also the generational history the traditional families still retain in acknowledging the community’s original name and its history.

Social Sustainability: Communicating Cultural and Environmental Legacies

The land and the people who populate the environment retain historical legacies. Incorporating both cultural and environmental histories into ecotourism is an approach that was acknowledged in more than one of my interviews. Since communities and environments are shaped by external social and cultural influences, participatory place-based ecotourism incorporates the history of the land and the values of the community. By place-based histories, I am referring to historical information about who lived on the land in the past and what events or practices have shaped the current condition of the environment of a place. The development of a community and the challenges it faces over the years often influence the narratives that are shared with visitors to the community.

As a guide with Guias da Natureza, Adilson leads tourists and visitors on trails sharing information about the biodiversity of the natural environment, pointing out plants and animals of interest along the path. Adilson recounts the history of the community’s origins at various landmarks, including a bouldered area that served as a hideout for runaway slaves, remnants of an early house, a waterfall, and the Açude do Camorim dam. As explained by Adilson, historically many parts of the Pedra Branca Forest were reforested by former slaves:

The Tijuca Forest was reforested by six slaves here at the time. At that time, Dom Pedro II, already had the Botanical Garden as the “palace garden”, and wanted to reforest all this part of the hill that was degraded by plantations. So he began, and, in this context, took some slaves here with some others he had. Most of the vegetation here was extracted
from the Pedra Branca Forest and carried by slaves by wagon and ox to do all the reforestation there (as reforestation was done here as well). The practice of caring for the forest continues today, as Adilson affirms that “we the old quilombo residents are the ones who take care of the natural environment here”. The legacy of the environmental stewardship of prior generations is a source of pride for Adilson. These histories are focal points during the hike, equal in weight to the information about the plant and animal species we observed along the trail.

With hopes of repurposing the remains of the abandoned framework of an old house built by a German who lived in the community after fleeing World War I, Adilson foresees the abandoned structure having the potential to be a museum of native seeds, plants, and taxidermied animals where visitors can learn more about the local natural environment and biodiversity. “We will have a cultural, environmental history and a tour of the existing fauna and flora through the museum.”

The use of environmental and cultural legacies in ecotourism work is an intentional decision that reflects the interconnectedness of people and the environment. As Thais stated in our conversation: “We were very concerned with preserving nature, but people are part of nature and that environment.”

The process of reconnecting to the past and sharing that knowledge through community activities, including ecotourism, has for Adilson served as a deeply rooted value in all the work he does in his community:

I have always been a person dedicated to my origins, I want to learn more about my ancestors, how it was before, if they were happy or not. I was growing within this search

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54 Adilson Almeida in discussion with the author, July 2016.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 Thais Pinheiro in conversation with the author, July 2016.
for my family history, but I never had a way of doing a project related to the social part of my history […] I thought that I had to create a social project and teach the community about our history, what it means to be quilombola. Many quilombo residents don’t know about their own history, they don’t know how to talk about their cultural history, how their culture was in the past, how their ancestors where and where they lived. If we asked them if they know that Camorim is a quilombo many of them would ask “what is a quilombo?” because they don’t search for their origins. I, however, always wanted to know my story, what it was like and where my ancestors came from. 58

Central to Adilson’s worldview is the Sankofa symbol. In our conversation he explained its cultural significance and how he intentionally incorporates it into all his work in the community, extending to cultural events as well as the ecotourism.

Sankofa is a bird with its head turned back and holding an egg. According to the [Inca?] dictionary it means return to the past, seek your origins, learn good things, bring those to the present and build a better future… To speak of it in my work and in my quilombo, I need to know my ancestors and where they came from. So I need to ask where I come from, who I am and where I want to go. 59

Thais reflected on the use of tourism as a way of maintaining a cycle of sharing community histories between residents and tourists. She has a positive outlook on the regeneration of community knowledge and traditions over time. “There are many communities where original traditions were changing. I never think that they are lost, they regenerate and I believe that tourism is also a way to recreate, because life is movement, we are always changing and communities are also changing, because the world [is changing].” 60

Thais’s framing of tourism as a means of recreating historic community traditions points to a larger purpose of ecotourism. In my conversation with her she mentioned the phrase social sustainability in relation to the development of community-based models of tourism. I asked her to define this phrase because it was one that I had independently associated with positive models

58 Adilson Almeida in conversation with the author, July 2016.
59 Ibid.
60 Thais Pinheiro in conversation with the author, July 2016.
of tourism that are participatory and engage with both the literal and cultural roots of a community. “I believe that social sustainability is a way to create tools so that these people participate in the whole development of the site. It’s really a way for [tourism] to be inserted there and to be able to generate resources. This is not only a territorial sustainability, but something bigger than ends up contributing to the environmental and cultural sustainability.”61

Adilson shares a similar perspective regarding the importance of including cultural knowledge alongside environmental education during his tours, noting this as a central difference between his community’s ecotourism project and other tourism agencies.

We work according to what nature offers, we are always respecting it. Because of this we take a pleasurable walk [that is] time-consuming, different from tourism agencies that take tourists into the environment, go straight to the attraction, do a quick walk without history and without content. Contrary to this, we have a pleasant walk where tourists leave here with a basic knowledge of the history of the discovery of Brazil, the history of the Quilombo and a rich environmental history (as we talk about fauna and flora). This is our base of community tourism in the Quilombo do Camorim.62

The impact of including narratives about his community’s history is part of a perspective of social sustainability. The narratives that are communicated to tourists are then taken outside the community to be shared with larger networks, helping carry on the history of this specific place.

Because the work will be recognized, it shall be multiplied by people not from the community, but by outsiders who end up being interested in history and sharing it. This is very important and I am very happy for this! There exist […] people who end up multiplying it. As an example, we can cite the people who come to do the ecological hike, where we set up the group, we do the hike, the person receives the story and ends up passing the contact to others. These other people come into contact saying they received referrals from friends who did the hike and told them about the history of the quilombo and are interested in setting up a group and come here to know the story. So the story ends up being passed on and passed on.63

61 Thais Pinheiro in conversation with the author, July 2016.
62 Adilson Almeida in conversation with the author, July 2016.
63 Ibid.
However, Adilson remarks that in some cases, tourists become more knowledgeable than some of the community members themselves. “There are people who come from outside and know much more history about this environment than some residents.”64 The hope is that with the Guias da Natureza ecotourism project recruiting the youth of the community to lead the hikes, they too will be learning and sharing their own community’s origin stories and helping regenerate these narratives across generations. “This present is to teach teenagers and children, because the future will depend on them. If they have a history, have culture, origins and know where they came from, they will have a better future and will discuss, learn to take the project forward.” 65

Otávio also acknowledged the value of sharing Vale Encantado’s local knowledge and innovation with people outside of the residential community. “I always say that the community is an incubator of ideas that can be applied in other regions, in other areas with the characteristics of Vale, or with other characteristics that can be adapted.”66 Beyond awareness for histories that were previously unknown to visitors, Otávio sees the potential for the sharing of ideas and technology in other communities. With a community-built bio digester, plans for a recycling system, and the locally sourced restaurant, Vale Encantado is a community with many environmentally sustainable solutions about which visitors can benefit from.

64 Adilson Almeida in conversation with the author, July 2016.
65 Ibid.
66 Otávio Barros in conversation with the author, July 2016.
Ecotourism as Empowerment: Challenging Stereotypes and Valorizing Lived Experiences

Participatory ecotourism that is place-based cannot be detached from the history of the place and its residents. Thus issues of social injustice and the potential for community empowerment can be found within the inner workings of some ecotourism models.

With the spread of knowledge through networks in and outside of communities, there is further potential for these communities to use participatory tourism as a means of empowering communities and serving as a platform for engaging with issues permeating both the community and larger society. Sharing personal narratives during tours or hikes allows community members an opportunity to communicating their narratives and histories on their own terms. Especially within socially and spatially marginalized communities this agency becomes a powerful tool.

Empowerment and representation in relation to community tourism was a theme all of my interviewees discussed. Thais and Adilson discussed issues of racial discrimination and stigmatization of Afro-Brazilian culture. “We are suffering a lot and [it is] felt in the skin within our African descended culture.” said Adilson. He elaborated on the spatial implications of slavery, colonization, and racism in Brazil:

Today we have the peripheries, as in the past, when Princess Isabel signed the Golden Law, the black people were thrown into the street and there was no option. Today the society taxes black [people] and black quilombolas\(^\text{67}\), poor and dirty living in the forest but in reality it is not like this. The truth is that [it was] our blood and the blood of our ancestors that built the country, which raised the city center. I think we should be looked at with a little more care and a little more respect. Our government does not really look at us as they should: with respect. This is a message that I leave, because we fight so that we can change a little bit the concept and respect for the quilombolas who struggle for social equality.\(^\text{68}\)

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\(^{67}\) The word quilombola refers to all residents of quilombo communities.

\(^{68}\) Adilson Almeida in conversation with the author, July 2016.
Much of the work Adilson does with community leaders in the Cultural Association of Quilombo do Camorim is reclaiming traditions, keeping them alive and in practice with the current community members. This intent extends to the dance, the capoeira, and the ecotourism activities the Cultural Association of the Quilombo do Camorim is involved with.

We are looking for the redemption of our culture, because at that time our ancestors planted without pesticides. We are now seeking to redeem these traditions. As yet we do not have a physical quilombo space, we have a resident of the quilombo that has a site, a good space and we are running this organic garden project there with them and with others in the community and surrounding areas. 

With the tourism work that Conectando Territórios does with traditional indigenous communities and quilombos, the issues of discrimination and stigmatized identities came up in my conversation with Thais:

I think the biggest mission of Conectando Territórios is working [with] the cultural diversity of Brazil from the voices of traditional communities, as a way to contribute to the social sustainability of each community (since each [community] works with tourism in its own way). We also intend to enhance the Afro-Brazilian and indigenous culture, cultures that are not highly valued by Brazilian society.

Adilson’s insight underscores the reality that Rio de Janeiro’s social and spatial divides are deep-rooted. In addition to facing challenges with regard to being incorporated into the city, quilombos, favelas, and indigenous communities also have the burden of social stigma against their communities. Thais sees it as her mission to introduce more tourists to communities that the mainstream tourism industry is not engaging with in ways that value and center the lived experiences of residents. “The idea has always been working with memory and history. That is, in fact…to give voice to communities to value their culture in many ways. Each community has its specificity, but the idea is always to bring what they do best and highlight it.”

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69 Adilson Almeida in conversation with the author, July 2016.
70 Thais Pinheiro in conversation with the author, July 2016.
71 Ibid.
This value of highlighting communities’ unique characters has been an important concept Thais has shared with new tour guides. While pursuing her master’s degree Thais was invited to teach a course entitled “Leading Groups on Cultural Attractions” at a technical school for tour guides in training. Thais used this opportunity to address the lack of visibility of tourism in traditional communities. Her goal has continually been to engage with participatory tourism that has a socially sustainable purpose. “I believe in community-based tourism. So I wanted to show these new guides that there was another kind of more inclusive tourism and that worked as a way for people to know the history of the communities that are part of Brazilian culture.”

Otávio shares similar thoughts on using community tourism as a way of invigorating the residents and allowing community perspectives to be shared with people and networks outside of Vale Encantado. “This work we are developing is justly to try to empower more residents” he says. “I am always and in the best way trying to give greater visibility to Vale Encantado to change that idea that the community is degrading.” The community has a lot to offer with its location in the middle of the forest, with beautiful views that can match some of the landmark sites that are frequented by tourists. Otávio hopes his community can reach more tourists and provide an equally as enjoyable tourism experience. “One of my dreams is to turn Vale Encantado into a tourist spot. Rio de Janeiro needs this wonderful view here, we are almost at the same height of the Christ the Redeemer statue.” As one of the landmarks of Rio de Janeiro, the Christ statue is an essential stop on many conventional tours. Expanding on what types of tourism are prioritized by the tourist would be beneficial for promoting smaller community-

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72 Thais taught her course at SENAC (Serviço Nacional de Aprendizagem Comercial), an institution for The National Service of Commercial Learning in Rio de Janeiro.
73 Thais Pinheiro in conversation with the author, July 2016.
74 Otávio Barros in conversation with the author, July 2016.
75 Ibid.
based tourism experiences that provide equally as picturesque views with richer stories and more personal experiences for tourists. “We are near the exit gate of the Tijuca Forest, so you can walk into the woods and enjoy nature and here you appreciate part of the nature, part of the food, the wonderful views we have and the tranquility of the place and the residents. This would be a really cool part for people to come to know.”

I asked Otávio what he would like people who are not from Vale Encantado to know about the community. His sentiments were those of countering stereotypes and allowing his community the chance to share its history and narratives from their own perspective. “[I want them to] know how the community lives, know that it is a quiet community, peaceful, no drug trafficking, has no militiamen, that these are traditional families in the Alto da Boa Vista region.”

Assessing the value of ecotourism and community work beyond monetary terms, Otávio commented on the other forms of returns he hopes to see in his community. “It is not a financial gain, but [a gain] of knowledge and benefits to the community itself.”

The agency for communities to have the platform and audience to share their stories and dispel assumptions that do not reflect their histories seems like a simple request. As Adilson said, “We fight for our rights, we struggle for stability of life, but we do not step on anyone.”

Attaining this it is still a challenge that many communities are working hard to address. Recognizing the influence that historically marginalized communities have had on the larger Brazilian society is a key point Thais spoke with me about:

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76 Otávio Barros in conversation with the author, July 2016.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 Adilson Almeida in conversation with the author, July 2016.
My mission is to make Brazilians feel valued and represented by their culture, because I think we have to know our roots. We, Brazilians, we cannot stop talking about the indigenous culture, which is the native culture, and also of Africans, a population that contributed to the formation of our society today. In fact, it was they who got their hands dirty for Brazil to be here. It is this, I believe we need to give a voice to and bring this story up. We cannot live thinking that it does not exist. In Brazil this story was all burned, erased and must come to light, this is why I say that this is my life mission.  

Representation and empowerment go hand in hand as natural responses to issues of misrepresentation and lack of societal acknowledgment for the legacies of marginalized communities. This can begin with communities knowing their history and having the opportunity to share it with those who engage with communities first hand through participatory tourism experiences.

**Challenges to Asserting Land Rights in Communities on the Margins**

Some of the challenges associated with communities that are informal or have no official land titles include threats of eviction and lack of government support for basic services. Adilson shared with me that although many quilombos can trace back their origins to their formation in the 19th century, many still do not have official land titles. The consequences of lacking official land titles make these communities more vulnerable to social and environmental injustices when these conditions are paired with a lack of governmental transparency.

Addressing land rights issues is a point of connection between many communities on the margins. Part of using tourism as a platform for communicating issues is addressing land rights conflicts. The intentionality of Thais’ tourism agency Conectando Territórios translating to Connecting Territories reflects the prevalence of this issue.

We must also talk about the issue of territory, because these communities always end up going through this issue of land (in many places there is realty speculation). Land conflict in Brazil is still a very big deal. So, we must also give visibility to these issues that people

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80 Thais Pinheiro in conversation with the author, July 2016.
do not know are happening. The tourist is always there to see good things, but real life is not just good things.\textsuperscript{81}

A case in point is revealed in Quilombo do Camorim, where there have been conflicts over condominium development encroaching on community land and even building on top of the community’s sacred burial site. Despite being federally recognized as a \textit{quilombo}, a large set of condominiums was built on land claimed by the Quilombo do Camorim with the intent to house journalists covering the 2016 Olympic Games. In addition to failing to conduct a public hearing between the construction company and the \textit{quilombo}, the condominiums were sited on the \textit{quilombo}’s sacred burial grounds.\textsuperscript{82} This disregard for the local community is reflected in the lack of communication or planning between government entities, creating distrust and a lack of credibility on the part of the government. Adilson explained the series of events that led to development projects altering his community:

This construction company arrived, did not have a public hearing with the residents or the body that oversees (INEA), just arrived and cleared native trees of almost three hundred years. The old mill had traces of slave bones that were buried around and many things were destroyed by [the construction]. If there had been a public hearing, we would have known about the construction before it began there.

That is, the lack of a public hearing between the construction company and the community ended up affecting a lot. As a compensatory measure, they donated part of the old mill to the city instead of giving it to the \textit{quilombo} to let us have our worthy land and maintain our cultural projects.

Politicians come here, promise beautiful projects, say they will help you and leave. I’ve had a bit of this experience and decided that for my life: if I do not want to be deceived, I will not mess with anyone. From the moment you enter, make a connection with some politician and then this politician defrauds me, I’m disrespecting my community and my project, and it’s not what I want. So I try to stay in a neutral position with politicians. I do my job well and develop my projects.\textsuperscript{83}

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\textsuperscript{81} Thais Pinheiro in conversation with the author, July 2016.
\textsuperscript{83} Adilson Almeida in conversation with the author, July 2016.
The influence of these construction projects was visible the first time I visited the community to participate on the hike with Adilson. The street leading up to the community is lined with new condominiums that look out of place as the residential areas become populated with smaller buildings near the forested entrance to the *quilombo*. With precarious relationships between government entities and communities like Adilson’s and Otávio’s it becomes even more important that community-based ecotourism projects address these issues.

Otávio shared similar challenges that Vale Encantado experienced with government influence. In response, community action has been a solution to address these issues:

When we created the cooperative in 2005-2006, there was a need to reactivate the Residents Association, because there was a complaint with the Public Ministry of the Environment saying that all communities (not only Vale Encantado, but all communities of the Alto Boa Vista area) were contributing to environmental degradation and polluting rivers.

We organized, created a group of people and reopened the Residents Association so that at any time we could file a lawsuit or defend in court because of the discrimination that was being made against the communities. So, we had an organization of the Association with the locals participating and we saw the need to have one more thing that could generate income for families.

As evidenced in the ecotourism initiatives in Vale Encantado and the Quilombo do Camorim, community projects and organized leadership serve to benefit residents and also communicate localized issues and injustices with those outside of the community. Striking proof of this concept’s influence is that Thais Pinheiro has adopted it as part of her business model. Taking on the role of a facilitator, Thais uses her position to generate a tourist base for existing community tourism projects that prioritize and directly benefit host communities. “I always say that community-based tourism is a way for people to stay in their own territories. First of all, with the profits from tourism, they no longer have to leave their own place to work in big cities (I believe

84 Otávio Barros in conversation with the author, July 2016.
this is the main factor). In addition to this, [community-based tourism] helps to keep the culture alive."85

85 Thais Pinheiro in conversation with the author, July 2016.
Chapter 4
Lessons in Reciprocity: Advice for the Responsible Tourist

At the core, this thesis investigates a two-part question: What factors contribute to responsible ecotourism, and in what ways can ecotourism challenge assumptions about peripheral communities and serve to communicate both the environmental and cultural history of a place? As seen through the case studies in the previous chapter, local economic benefits and active community participation are not the only factors to consider when determining what characterizes responsible ecotourism. By engaging with and educating others about the cultural and environmental history of a place, ecotourism can be framed to address specific local challenges as well as larger societal issues impacting the host community. The extent to which ecotourism educates tourists and empowers the community are factors that contribute to the value and impact of an ecotourism project. When framed with intentionality, community-based ecotourism can be an educational platform and an incubator for community empowerment.

The Implications of Responsible Community-based Ecotourism:

People are inherently a part of the environment, therefore a place-based approach to ecotourism begins with the land and includes the histories of people who inhabit that environment over time.\(^{86}\) The variety of issues that community-based ecotourism can address in a single location reveals the versatility of this niche within the tourism industry. While the characteristics of strong community leadership, control in the hands of the host community, and productive economic returns to the community are generally applicable to any community-based

ecotourism development, the unique history and environmental knowledge of a location distinguish place-based ecotourism projects. The narratives in the previous chapter situated community-based ecotourism in relation to the following themes and issues: the value of history being written into the environment, carrying on cultural and environmental legacies through ecotourism, using ecotourism as empowerment, and challenges to asserting land rights for peripheral communities. These themes, while specific to the context of each case study location, may be applicable to other communities that share in similar histories of social and environmental injustices. Although not all communities on the margins are suited for ecotourism, those that are may find ecotourism to be a medium through which to communicate their own stories.

Paralleling environmental-justice frameworks, community-based ecotourism can use the cultural and environmental history of a place to educate and engage tourists in issues of social and environmental injustice. For peripheral communities, ecotourism can function as a way of addressing issues of injustice and dispelling assumptions about marginalized communities.

Returning to the comparisons drawn between toxic tourism and ecotourism as discussed in Chapter Two, framing a place and its environment within a historical context can dispel assumptions that the condition of an environment is unaffected by larger sociocultural influences. In the American context, environmental justice communities are often low-income communities of color that experience disproportionate impacts from being exposed to polluted environments that contribute to health problems and have difficulty accessing basic public services. Similarly, the communities on the margins in Rio de Janeiro have histories of governmental neglect and social stigma in response to the poorer and racially generated conditions of their environments. There is a tendency to blame the environmental conditions on
the people living there versus questioning the larger structural issues that created landscapes of disparity, exposing residents to physical risks and socially prescribed stigma. This is why it is critical that communities have the agency to share their perspectives and lived experiences that address the complex histories that contextualize socially assigned stereotypes.

Centering the perspectives of the community through ecotourism allows often unheard voices to tell the stories of their own land, asserting their right to spaces that are not often given the value or respect that they deserve. Focusing specifically on the ways in which ecotourism can be a means of asserting land rights, this type of tourism offers the host community an opportunity to be the narrators in their own story of the land, allowing them to claim the history of the land. Using narration as a means of asserting rights to land, history is framed through the lens of the host community, prioritizing their perspectives. The hikes and eco tours become a space to share the intergenerational memory of the community and their stories of living and working with the land.

Adilson, Otávio, and Thais all discussed the importance of communities knowing the origins of their land and reclaiming those histories. For communities who have faced challenges in the process of obtaining land rights or even being recognized as a part of the official city, the process of asserting land rights begins with understanding both the ecological components of the environment and the legacies of people who have shaped the the land over time. Further depth and engagement with the land histories of a place is required for the development of a sustainable ecotourism practice. This reflective work grounds a community’s current interactions with its environment, acknowledging where they have come from and where they plan to go in the future, an empowering process.
Positionality and Facilitation: The Role of Third Parties in Community-based Ecotourism

Ecotourism is most effective and ethically responsible when it is organized by the host community with consideration for the needs of the community and the local environment. However, it is possible to have a significant role in community-based ecotourism without being directly from the host community. Navigating the role of a third-party agency in community-based ecotourism appears to contradict the argument throughout this thesis that those organizing community-based ecotourism must be directly from the host community. However, it is notable that Thais Pinheiro’s tourism agency Conectando Territórios has taken on the role of a facilitator for community-based tourism.

While it is critical to have direct involvement and leadership from within the host community, the case of Thais’ tourism agency represents an option for expanding what community-based ecotourism can look like. Taking on the role of the facilitator is a very delicate position to be in. However, as we can see from Thais’ work with her third-party tourism agency Connectando Territórios, the role of the facilitator can be an active link between tourists and local communities who have organized ecotourism programs in relation to their local environment and community priorities. Thais understands that her company must support existing community tourism, while generating interest and more tourist participation in unconventional or less advertised tourism experiences. For example, Thais has worked in partnership with Otávio and the ecotourism project in Vale Encantado. Thais advertises community-based tours through her own networks, generating interest and participation from tourists, then on the day of a tour she introduces tourists to the community guide, who then takes on the leadership of conducting the tour and introducing tourists to the community.
The facilitator does not diminish the agency of the host community, nor do they redirect the priorities and profits away from the local community towards a third party. Facilitators do not project their own priorities upon the host community, but rather help advertise and generate tourist interest so that more people can participate on tours on the terms of the host community. Taking on the role of a facilitator allows individuals or entities who respect the value of tourism that valorizes and prioritizes the host community to have a role in sustaining positive examples of community-based ecotourism. Encouraging more relationships like this between facilitators and communities has the potential to help grow a substantial network of community-based tourism.

**Vacationing as a Responsible Tourist:**

An analysis of best practices for developing community-based tourism cannot be complete without acknowledging the role and responsibilities of those participating on these ecotourism experiences as tourists. I have intentionally focused the majority of this thesis on the perspectives of the community organizers and facilitating third parties who are developing strategies for community-based ecotourism. Often tourism is framed as an industry that works for the pleasure of the tourist, giving little consideration to the environmental consequences of increased tourist traffic and the impacts of marketing people and places for the entertainment of those who possess the luxury to travel. By spending more of this thesis focusing on the strategies and practices implemented by the host community, I have given preference to their perspectives and flipped the priority that is typically given to tourists. However, discussions of responsible ecotourism cannot be complete without acknowledging the role and responsibilities of the tourist.

As with toxic tourism, community-based ecotourism is educational and forces the tourist into a situation where they must think critically about the environment they are visiting and the
lived experiences and challenges faced by the host community—and these in relation to their own worlds. For some tourists this level of intimacy required when visiting the realities experienced in a residential community dissimilar from their own community can be discomforting. However, those feelings challenge the tourist to take on the role of an active learner and a communicator of the information gained from an experience that is not tailored to the tourist’s priorities but rather those of the host community.

While tourism is an export industry designed to please vacationers, I argue that tourists cannot be apathetic consumers of new landscapes and environments that their social and economic capital can afford them. While education tourism like toxic tours can be uncomfortable because they force the tourist to intimately engage with issues of social and environmental injustice, these forms of tourism are necessary for making impactful changes in the tourism industry that shift the focus from serving the needs of the tourist to creating a place for dialogue and the exchange of information and stories.

I am expanding the definition of participatory tourism to encompass the involvement of community members on the organizing side of the ecotourism and the active participation of tourists as well. Tourists have a responsibility to no longer remain passive vacationers. Active engagement is a necessity in ecotourism, especially community-based projects. These community-based projects are regenerating ecotourism as a commercial industry to reframe and critically engage with issues that permeate local communities and the larger society. A responsible tourist becomes a receptor of this new knowledge, in hopes that the conversations initiated in one place can be shared across environments.

In addition to tourists taking on the role of a communicator, I believe it would be valuable to establish a network between communities with established community-based
ecotourism projects and communities interested in implementing ecotourism projects to communicate about effective strategies. However, using ecotourism as a platform for engaging with issues of social and environmental injustice only goes so far. By itself, community-based ecotourism is not a simple solution for difficult land rights issues. Sharing community narratives does not directly give communities official titles to their land. Awareness of these issues by those who are not directly experiences the impact is thus only one step in a longer process of developing and implementing effective policy to address issues of lands rights.

Acknowledging the scale of these processes should be further incentive to think critically about what the responsibilities of the tourist should be. Community-based ecotourism as a platform for engaging with issues of environmental injustice, stigma, discrimination, and land rights only functions if the host community is advocating the messages and if the tourist is receptive to the information. This is a reciprocal process and a collaborative effort. Being an active participant does not stop when the vacation is over. As a receptive participant, the tourist has a responsibility to learn, engage, and share the stories that are communicated through creative mediums such as ecotourism. Social sustainability requires active engagement, communication, and is rooted in the values of responsibility and reciprocity.
Conclusion

Participatory place-based ecotourism offers a tangible example of environmental education and community empowerment working together to generate a positive model of socially sustainable tourism. Discouraged by the existing critiques of ecotourism exploiting host communities and encouraging intrusive travel behavior, I have sought to investigate alternative models of ecotourism that are mutually beneficial for host communities and tourists and travelers. By engaging with the practical strategies and first-hand experiences of community organizers in Rio de Janeiro, I have learned that their unique community-based ecotourism projects offer tangible solutions for reframing ecotourism in a way that prioritizes the needs and perspectives of the hosts rather than solely working to please the tourist.

As seen through the case studies, community-based ecotourism has the potential to serve as a platform for communicating with visitors the needs and priorities of the community. Simultaneously, this model of ecotourism is rooted in the land histories and cultural legacies of the environment in which it is hosted. This can be further motivation for communities to learn about their histories and use that knowledge to encourage collective action.

While the ecotourism projects explored in this thesis are unique to the experiences of these specific peripheral communities in Rio de Janeiro, the use of educational tourism to address social and environmental injustice is a strategy other communities might implement. Using community-based ecotourism to assert land rights and address social stigmas can bring visibility to these localized problems by disseminating this information through tourist networks. However, merely talking about the gravity of these issues with people outside the community may not be enough to immediately secure land rights for marginalized communities, end social stigma, or change structural barriers to accessibility. Further research is needed to determine
what the next steps for accomplishing these goals. If community-based ecotourism can be one step in the process, how can these valuable community efforts been catalyzed into tangible policy changes?

With that I once more emphasize the importance of respect and reciprocity when taking on the position of a tourist or traveler. The process of writing this thesis has been an opportunity for me to self-reflect on my position as a tourist, traveler, and researcher, and the privileges associated with my ability claim those roles. Whether it be the possession of free time, social capital, financial stability, documentation, or physical ability, the opportunity to travel should not be something to take for granted. For those who also have the privilege to travel, take this opportunity to also reflect on what the value of traveling is, and whether we as travelers have duties or responsibilities when traveling to new places.

For some, the value of a vacation is measured in the amount of photos taken or iconic landmarks visited. However, my experiences participating in community-based ecotourism have reinforced my existing perspective that the value of travel is found in the ability to learn from and exchange stories with people that will ultimately help shape our ever-developing worldviews. Beyond being a way of appreciating the similarities and differences between people with unique lived experiences, learning about another place through interpersonal experiences with local communities can be seen as a form of respect. As a traveler and tourist, it is a way of showing interest and appreciation for the place you are in.

Community-based ecotourism is an opportunity to become an active participant in the regeneration process of learning and sharing place-based cultural and environmental histories. Once trusted with the stories and knowledge from these interactions, we have a responsibility to share this information through our own circles, continuing this cycle social sustainability.
Appendix

Map 1: Map of the full city limits of Rio de Janeiro indicating the locations of the two case study communities Quilombo do Camorim and Vale Encantado (Map created by the author).
Map 2: Tourist Map of Rio de Janeiro. This portrayal of the city highlights principal tourist attractions such as the Christ statue, Sugarloaf Mountain, and the famous beaches of Copacabana and Ipanema. However, the map is a flawed representation of the city. Unlike the previous map, this image is limited in scale, failing to show the full extent of Rio’s West and North zones. This map presents the forested mountains as empty, when in reality they are covered with densely populated favela communities. This is the limited view of the city that is marketed to tourists.

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