

Ecotourism, Conservation and Power in Senegal's Sine Saloum Delta

I used my Dinah Dodds grant to conduct field research and interviews towards my Senior thesis. I explored the emergence of ecotourism in the Sine Saloum Delta, specifically in the towns of Sokone, Toubaouta, and Sangako.



Ecotourism is a development strategy and a form of “sustainable tourism.” It attempts to create a system in which tourists’ consumption practices benefit the place they are visiting. Ecotourists consume only local foods, services, and goods, thereby stimulating the local economy. Their money is directed towards developmental projects in the community (such as mangrove reforestation, adult education, recycling and compost systems, handicap centers, and the funding of Protected Areas).

I met and interviewed many people connected with ecotourism, including:

- 3 young ecotourist guides from Sokone
- 3 managers of hotels incorporating principles of ecotourism
- A professor of ecotourism for graduate students
- A leader in Jokko, the Economic Interest Group in Sokone
- A technician from the Union for the Conservation of Nature, the organization largely responsible for implementing ecotourism in the Delta
- The Chief of the Natural Resource Management division in the Senegalese Environmental Ministry

Thanks to the Dinah Dodds grant, I was able to gather field data and forge important relationships to help me answer my thesis question: **How does ecotourism, as an agent of both conservation and development, impact power relations between actors in the Sine Saloum Delta?** I have not yet formalized my conclusion, but see evidence of a shift in agency from locals to tourists and global institutions.

Ecotourism offers economic incentives for locals to support environmental and cultural conservation. A complex situation arises in which locals, persuaded to accept ecotourism for its monetary contributions, can lose agency in determining their material and social realities. Some signs of this are:

- Creation of jobs based on hospitality leads to community dependency on tourists.
- Implementation of Protected Areas and Heritage Sites limits exploitation and production on the land.
- Institutional voices that profit from conservation measures impose values of cultural and environmental conservation on locals.



This project opened my eyes to the complexities of cultural exchange and global trade. I hope my conclusions will contribute new perspectives and data towards conversations about the goals and impacts of ecotourism for both tourists and locals. Thank you for this opportunity!