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Introduction: the meaning of 'place'

In this chapter we want to examine what it is that makes places 'sustainable', both from a conceptual perspective and through the use of case material from the Mexican Caribbean. Within most of the geographical canon 'space' has been given much closer attention than 'place'. As McDowell suggests, this is because place is best seen as contextual: "the significance of place depends on the issue under consideration and the sets of social relations that are relevant to the issues" (McDowell 1997, 4). As we will argue later, place is frequently used in a way that takes on meaning from the context in which it is employed, rather than conveying meaning itself. Modern science tended to disregard place by equating it with lack of generality (Casey 1997). In physics, geography, and social sciences the use of coordinates, maps, statistics, and other simplifying and objectifying pictures dominated the representation of places in spatial terms. The dimensions of, and actions in, space have similar meanings for everybody. Consequently, space allows scientists to adopt a role of outside observers of places, while the modern concept of "region" is often taken as a natural unit of spatial and social organization (Curry 2002). In social theories, space was assumed to be featureless and undifferentiated and was often used for predicting patterns of land-use and economic activities without describing place in any real sense except as a product of historical accident (Johnson 2002).

However, spatial representations of place were problematized during the second half of the twentieth century. Lefebvre (1974) and Foucault (1986) questioned the definition of absolute space in terms of Euclidean geometry, and claimed that regions are socially constructed. The human dimension of spatiality was emphasized and the notion of place acquired a renewed relevance not only among the disciplines which traditionally deal with place (e.g. geography, planning, chorography, and philosophy), but also among less related disciplines (e.g. anthropology, cultural studies, ecology, psychology, and phenomenology). Significant efforts for defining the concept and formulating an adequate theory of place have been developed from these disciplines. Although it is not clear whether the adoption of a unique definition would be either possible or desirable, these multiple perspectives of place agree that places are more than geographic settings with physical or spatial characteristics; they are fluid, changeable, dynamic contexts of social interaction and memory (Harrison and Dourish 1996, Stokowski 2002).

In a path-breaking work Tuan (1977) argued that experiences of places involve perception, cognition, and affection. Similarly, Relph (1976) identified three components of place: physical setting, activities and meanings. According to these authors, a place cannot simply be described as the location of one object relative to others. The concept of place has to integrate both its location and its meaning in the context of human action. As Tuan (1977) puts it: "place is space infused with human meaning". Working on similar lines, Agnew (1987) studied the relationship

between place and human behavior and proposed a compositional view of places as being constituted by economic, institutional, and socio-cultural processes. Agnew identified three basic elements of place: location, locale and sense of place. Location is the role a place plays in the world-economy; locale, the institutional setting of a place; and sense of place, the identities forged and given meaning within places.

Among the most important recent thinking about place is that of Doreen Massey and Noel Castree. Massey (1994) suggested a more dynamic view of places as “networks of social relations”. According to her, places are continually changing as a result of economic, institutional and cultural transformation. Places are not essences but processes and places do not necessarily mean the same thing to everybody (Massey 1994). In addition, for Massey the nature of a place is a product of its linkages with other places and not just a matter of its internal features. Places appear as points of intersection, integrating the global and the local. She writes that: “displacement, most particularly through migration, depends... on a prior notion of cultures embedded in place” (Massey and Jess 1995, 1). Determining place, “drawing boundaries in space... is always a social act”. She adds that the dominant notions of place, with which we are familiar “is one that arises as a result of the changes going on in the world around us” (Massey and Jess 1995, 63). For Massey place is not a free-standing concept, but one that should be used transitively, attaching itself to another ‘object’, that might help illuminating it. She ends by providing almost a ‘place’ advocacy, which she terms a “progressive sense of place”, through which geographers, and others, might take the part of communities and social classes.

Castree’s contribution to the conceptualization of place is rather different. He argues that Marxist geographers were, “preoccupied with the inter-place connections more than specific place differences”, in effect ignoring the saliency of place itself (Castree 2003, 170). While broadly sympathetic to the humanistic geographers’ perspective on place, which sought to “recover people’s sense of place... that is, how different individuals and groups... develop meaningful attachments to those specific areas where they live out their lives...” (Castree 2003, 170) he invokes neurological circuit metaphors, ‘switching points’ and ‘nodes’ to suggest the degrees to which places are plugged into different sets of global relations. He argues that globalization has resulted “in an exciting and innovative redefinition of what place means, seeing “place differences as both cause and effect of place connections” (Castree 2003, 166).

The significance of place is that it has both cognitive and normative meanings. It involves the ‘humanisation’ of space, of territory. In this sense the experience of spatial relations is always a social construction; an inevitable consequence of human consciousness. It is impossible to distinguish a ‘place’ to which some group of people do not belong. (The obvious exception to this claim is the Antarctic – but even this has been colonised by research scientists).

A sense of ‘belonging’, then, is a key element of the way space is socialised. What we ‘belong to’, of course, is itself a diachronic process, a liminal process in which the human actors themselves define place through the way their institutions evolve, as well as the territory they occupy. It is also suggested by the way they dress. An example of this is the United States/Mexican border on the Rio Grande River. In 1823 when Mexico gained Independence, most of the west and south of the (now) United States formed a part of Mexico. Photographs of the Rio Grande from just after the Mexican Revolution of 1910 show very differently dressed people on each side of the divide. On the American side ladies in long white ‘Edwardian’

dresses stand with men in smart, fashionable hats, while on the Mexican side the men resemble followers of Emiliano Zapata, with big broad brimmed hats and 'campesino' attire. Similarly, a contemporary image of Los Angeles (California) in 1912 features a 'Zocalo' (main square) like any in a large Mexican town, and the population that belongs there is dressed as Mexican.

These kinds of images illustrate one of the key points in our argument: that agency and culture mediate intention. Place is not simply a product of human agency it is a cultural product, the filter through which agency finds expression and, subject to the structural binds of culture, the binds that define culture. Place is a vector of culture, a vehicle for the transference and ownership of human institutions. This sense of belonging and ownership is often involuntary: as in the case of ghettos and prisons. Human institutions often imply 'ownership' and 'belonging', as we have seen, but people are often *displaced*, rather than located in a place, and the places they inhabit are transgressive places, where they seek to retrieve the 'memory' of place and own it, just as Palestinians or Kurds today own a place-location that is no longer their own.

What makes place sustainable, then? Several factors come into play. First, the retention of cultural identity, that I have discussed above, contributes to a 'sense of place', and a way of life that is chosen, although often by our culture and through transgression rather than individual agency. Second, what makes place sustainable is linked to the way that we come to value the environment, itself an anthropogenic process, not a 'given' in physical or spatial terms. In seeking to answer this question I would like to consider one area in which place has been both constructed and deconstructed, largely around the labels that we attach to place in the litany (and taxonomy) of tourism. After considering these materials from the Mexican Caribbean I want to return to the question of what makes these places (un)sustainable.

Ecotourism in Mexico: the construction of place?

"Cancun, until very recently, was an unknown area. Formerly it was a fishing town but over a period of thirty years it evolved into a place that has become famous worldwide. It is located in the south-east of Mexico, with no more 'body' to it than the living spirit of the Mayas, a race that mysteriously disappeared and who were one of the great pre-Columbian cultures in Mexico. The only thing that remained was the land transformed into a paradise on earth..."

Everest Tourist Guide 2002.

The development of Cancun in the 1970s transformed the Yucatan peninsular, on which it is located, from a unique ethnographic site of particular interest to archaeologists and anthropologists, into a 'global space' for tourists. The coast south of Cancun, the so-called 'Mayan Riviera', is now one of the fastest growing urban areas of Latin America, and plans are well advanced to take this process much further. Together with mass tourism, evidenced in the 'all-inclusive' hotels of Cancun itself, other more diversified forms of tourism have become established, which attempt in various ways to recombine several elements: the Mayan identity (real or imagined), closeness to nature, closeness to history (real or imagined) and the involvement of local communities. Under the sobriquet of 'communal tourism', 'sustainable tourism' and 'ecotourism' distinct social groups have entered the tourist market, most of it geared to international tastes. Travelling in the remote interior of the Yucatan, in areas where the local population speaks little Spanish and practices 'slash and burn' agriculture, one hears

the same refrain: 'how can we get started with *ecotourism*?' In this chapter I want to examine some of the moral dimensions of these choices in the light of these experiences in the Yucatan, and the pursuit of more sustainable development.

I would like to consider three varieties of ecotourism in the Mexican Caribbean – global 'Eco-Parks', official conservation areas or Biosphere Reserves, and local-level community or *ejidos* initiatives – and to consider each of these from the standpoint of their moral claims and discursive constructions. In each case we consider who are the principal beneficiaries, and the wider implications of practices for the achievement of more sustainable development.

(1) *'Eco-Parks' on the Mexican Caribbean*

After the development of Cancun in the 1970s the coast to the south was opened up to developers, and with it one of the most alluring ecosystems in the Caribbean. Anyone travelling along this coast in the early 1970s, as I did, was able to leave the car on the narrow coastal road, and explore a complex system of freshwater 'sinks' and caves systems, cut into the limestone, and called '*cenotes*', which are typical of Karst limestone areas. These freshwater lakes, many of them underground, were linked to tropical lagoons on the coast itself, and the passing tourist (of whom there were few in the 1970s) had unlimited and free access to them. Within a couple of decades most of these attractive, natural sites had been converted into 'Eco-Parks', an hybridised tourist park, combining the natural wonder of the original site with features more like those of international attractions such as 'Disneyworld'. The lagoons and *cenotes* were retained, but they were embellished with new 'Mayan villages', restaurants, bars and other tourist attractions. Dolphins were imported so that visitors could 'swim with dolphins', and 'Mayan' dancers entertained the visitors to 'traditional' dances and music. Most of the visitors came on a day basis, mainly by coach from Cancun and Playa, and paid up to \$50 US per head.

The accounts of eco-tourist development, from brochures and tourist magazines, suggest that words such as 'nature', 'natural' and 'sustainable' can be used, to good effect, in a number of ways. By throwing a cordon around part of the coast, and enclosing a salt-water lagoon, the developers of resorts like Xell-Ha, one of the most extensive 'Eco-Parks' south of Playa, were able to brand 'nature' with a company name, to privatize it. Each of these 'parks' provides a variety of tourist facilities, including restaurants and shops, which sell a product that is both a 'natural' and a social construction. They promise a safe recreational experience, complete with limestone sinkholes or *cenotes*, which are developed for kayaking, swimming and snorkelling.

The line between the 'natural' and the 'human-made' is also blurred in other ways. Many of the local staff working in the Eco-Parks are ethnically Mayan, but the restaurants and cafes that sell "Mayan" cuisine, and the bands that play "Mayan" music, are a counterfeit of the Mayan culture. At one level it appears to work: people signing the visitors' book, thank the resort for offering them the chance "...to live among the Mayan people..." The reality and the allusion are often indistinguishable to them, particularly since the resorts claim to be both 'ethical' in their stance on ecology and in relation to the integrity of the Mayan culture represented there. The *ethnic* label 'Mayan' is the exact complement of the *eco* labels, such as 'nature', 'natural' and 'sustainable', which describe almost every activity which visitors are invited to undertake.

(2) Biosphere Reserves

In contrast to the global eco-parks, the coast also boasts a major UNESCO designated Biosphere Reserve, called Xian Ka'an, to the south of the major resort areas. The Mexican Government created this reserve, with an extension of 1.3 million acres, in 1986. The following year it was designated as a World Heritage Site and, ten years later, another two hundred thousand acres were added. Today the Reserve accounts for ten per cent of the land area of the state of Quintana Roo, and over one hundred kilometres of coast is within its boundaries. It includes a population of several thousand local Mayan people, and twenty-seven archaeological ruins.

Before declaring this reserve a more 'authentic' example of environmental protection than the global eco-parks, we might reflect upon the meaning of 'Nature' in this hybridized context. The Biosphere Reserve of Xian Ka'an is as much an artificial creation as the resorts of Xcaret or Xell-Ha, although its claims to conserve nature might sound more worthy of attention. It is intended to be free from development, and provides limited access to visitors with a serious interest in conservation ecology. These claims need to be placed in context however: most tourists who come to the Mexican Caribbean do not visit Xian-Ka'an, nor could it withstand mass tourism. Xian-Ka'an is able to fulfill this role because of the existence of more commercial resorts, which meet the needs of mass tourism. To fully appreciate the contribution of reserves like Xian-Khan one needs also to consider the Eco-Parks with mass appeal, like Xcaret, Xell-Ha and Xpu-Ha, which have transformed the natural environment into something which can be more readily 'consumed'.

These observations suggest that, like the descriptions of "eco-friendly" hotels in Playa del Carmen, the largest resort south of Cancun, which are a manifestation of the environmental consciousness of the tourist developers, this is a pre-emptive 'environmentalism', designed to disarm the environmental critic, and to demonstrate that coastal developers have learned hard lessons from the bad publicity over Cancun. They have adopted the new language of sustainability, and reinvented these places within the changing context of sustainability rhetoric. At the same time it can be argued that these parks absorb increasing numbers of global tourists, many of whom would visit the Yucatan peninsular whether or not they existed. They may act as 'honey pots', by attracting tourists away from areas of ecological interest that would otherwise be under threat.

Behind the rhetoric of eco-tourism lie other conflicts of interest over the environment of which most tourists remain oblivious. One example is the opposition being mounted by local peasant families (*ejidatarios*) to the Mexican electricity utility (C.F.E.), which, they claim, has deforested their land. Rallies to condemn these activities have been an almost daily occurrence in the region in the last few years. Similarly, there has been much public criticism of the dangers and risks inherent in speculative development, notably in the construction of sub-standard hotels. In some of these hotels electric cables run dangerously through hotel swimming pools and visitors are exposed to numerous avoidable hazards, denounced in the local press. These ecological disasters, which might affect tourist safety, like the destruction of reefs, mangroves and turtle breeding grounds, now form part of the daily currency of political discussion on the coast. They serve to increase the efforts of some developers, and to convince sceptical publics, that their products are free from the taint of ecological risk or damage. The presence of tourism in these locations has moved the environmental debate towards greater consideration of their risk and

security, as elements of wider environmental vulnerability. These new 'consumer' concerns parallel the ecological vulnerabilities that drew some of the visitors to the area in the first place.

To fully understand what is happening on the 'Mayan Riviera', we need look no further than the way in which towns themselves have themselves been 're-branded'. Until 1999, the principal administrative unit (*municipio*) to the south of Cancun was called Solidaridad ("solidarity"), a name suggestive of the Mexican Revolution. Enthusiasts for the 'Mayan World' then suggested that it should be renamed 'Xiamen H'a', its original name in Maya, but one that is rarely used locally. (Most of the ethnically Mayan population has only a superficial knowledge of the language). A third, and dominant view, supported by developers, was that the name Playa Del Carmen (the beach of 'Carmen') should continue to be employed, since it was well known in tourist brochures and was good for promotional reasons.

In effect, the same place was being accorded three separate identities: one administrative and linked to the Mexican state, another conferring an ethnic identity, and the third exploiting the familiarity of the tourist connection. One view of the resurgence of interest in Mayan culture, especially among intellectuals and middle-class well wishers, places these historical oppositions firmly within the camp of contemporary protest over environmental/ethnic abuses in the region. Others caution that both ethnic and environmental struggles in contemporary Latin America have failed to deliver a viable political platform and that there are dangers in associating 'Mayan' identity with 'Nature', and oppositional politics.

(3) Community and ejido tourism

Most of the examples of 'eco-tourism' provided in this chapter rest on a guarantee of strong consumer demand from international tourist markets, combined with high levels of capital investment, from a combination of private and Mexican state sources. The benefits of these 'hybrid natures' are communicated widely, notably on the World Wide Web, and command attention from prospective tourists in markets geographically remote from the sites themselves. The 'moralities' conveyed are complex, for the consumer of the amenity, as well as for the provider in many cases.

However, new 'eco-tourist' initiatives are also developing on the Mexican Caribbean coast, and at a very different spatial level: that of the local community or '*ejido*'. An *ejido* is a peasant community in which community members share the usufruct to land, rights which were provided them by the Mexican Revolution. In most cases today the agricultural land is worked privately, but many activities, and some resources, are still held in common. In the case of the Yucatan peninsula, one of the most important of these resources is the '*cenote*', a natural well or sink-hole in the limestone carapace that covers the region, and which accounts for most of the groundwater, since there are no rivers. As we have seen these *cenotes* are often very beautiful, and the clear, fresh water acts as a magnet for swimmers, divers and caving specialists. Since much of the water system is underground, it is often inaccessible unless a guide is provided and the *cenote* can be mapped and fully explored. Obviously many *cenotes* are completely inaccessible, but others exist close to main arterial roads and resorts. In some cases local communities provide snorkelling and diving gear to visitors, as well as tour facilities, and the mouth of the *cenote* is utilised as an open-air market, selling artisan goods, hammocks, embroideries and pots. For small communities the attractions of the natural *cenote* provide

access to tourists who would otherwise be removed from contact by commercial agencies, especially young travellers, backpackers and national tourists.

An interesting case is that of 'Santa Catalina', a large *ejido* which was once a plantation dedicated to *henequen*, the sisal-like 'cactus' that once provided the Yucatan with its principal source of foreign exchange. Henequen was used until the early twentieth century for making ropes and carpets, before the development of synthetic fibres.

In the case of the Santa Catalina the fall in demand for henequen persuaded the original plantation owners to abandon their estate, which they agreed to sell on to the former estate workers. There were few business opportunities in henequen production, however, so the agricultural workers had to identify other means of support, to supplement their income from their own *milpa* (corn) plots. They decided to take what we would describe today as the 'heritage' route, converting the old single rail track and the wooden wagons which transported the henequen leaves, into facilities for visiting tourists. The horse-drawn wagons pick up the tourists in the middle of the *ejido*, where there is a small restaurant and shop, and take them across the estate, visiting a number of *cenotes* en route, where the tourists descend into the holes, swim and snorkel, and eventually rejoin their party for the trip back to the village. The income from conducting these tours is small compared with that from global 'Ecoparcs', or specialist eco-tourist enterprises, but for the one hundred and twenty families living on the *ejido*, it represents a significant source of income.

The community members are proud that they took the initiative and that it is still largely in their hands, although they are dependent on tour agencies to direct many of the tourists to their village. In their view what they offer has educational value, too, which most tourists would not gain elsewhere – they are introduced to the economy of a primary industry, combined with the attraction of a major recreational amenity. There is no doubt at all that their enterprise conveys 'sustainability' in a tangible form – the old tracks and rolling stock are used, the landscape and ecology of the area is not destroyed, they ensure that the beauty and splendour of the *cenotes* are not despoiled. To community members their activities in encouraging 'ecotourism' are morally defensible, indeed, they represent an example of how local resources can be redeployed, especially in an area of high underemployment, to reinforce, rather than undermine, the idea of sustainability as a moral precept.

There are many communities which have established 'eco' or 'ethno'-tourist enterprises, utilising local resources and initiative. Often they need some outside capital investment to begin commercially, but in other cases, the existence of a community 'gatekeeper' is enough to stimulate activity. One branch of community ecotourism consists of inviting foreign tourists to share their houses, or '*palapas*', for brief periods, when the tourists are taught the Yucatan Maya language and introduced to the ecology of the area. These are obviously small, niche, markets, but again they can be important to local communities with very limited cash incomes.

A more controversial example is provided by the 'Pueblo Chiclero' of Chachoben, inland from the so-called 'Costa Maya', to the south of the Biosphere Reserve Xian Ka'an. This village was originally a settlement of *chicleros*, the men who tapped the resin known as *chicle* from the tropical *chicozapote* tree. This industry was of enormous importance in the past, and supported over one hundred thousand workers at its height in the first half of the twentieth century (Redcliff

2004). The *chicle* resin was converted into chewing gum, and bought by large international companies, notably William Wrigley's. However the history of chewing gum is largely unknown outside the region, and seemed to offer an opportunity for tourism, especially with the development of the southern 'Costa Maya' coast. The state government of Quintana Roo, and local private developers have already constructed a port for international cruise ships visiting the town of Majahual on the coast. The tourists from the cruise ships are transported fifty kilometres inland, along six lane highways through the forest and mangrove swamps, to the community of Chachoben and the 'Pueblo Chiclero'. Here local guides will take them into the forest to see how *chicle* was harvested, to visit a chiclero encampment or '*harto*', and to learn something of the tropical forest ecology. This initiative was taken jointly by the local village and the state government, and appears to have strong local backing. Many of the people involved as 'guides' (who also have the opportunity to sell their artisan goods) take great pride in their families' history as *chicleros*, and their knowledge of the trees and animals of the tropical forest. From the perspective of the local community, this represents a 'sustainable' tourist option, since it generates income locally, and enables local people to re-invest profits from tourism.

The impacts of the new motorways and port are more open to challenge. Most infrastructural developments of this type bring enormous financial gains to a small number of rich developers, and land is often compulsorily purchased. At the same time local people, especially in the interior, seek better communications with the rest of the peninsular, and want to benefit from some of the income generated around tourism. From the perspective of local, indigenous communities, eco-tourist developments like Chachoben and Santa Catalina chart a route into quite different moral territory, by suggesting ways in which *identity* and *self-determination* might be gains from what might otherwise be a simply money-making enterprise from which most people were excluded.

Conclusion

The meanings of 'Mayan' and 'Nature' are no longer, if they ever were, of local or parochial significance alone: they are now part of a global lexicon. They also carry messages across time, from the nineteenth century Caste War of Yucatan and across space, from North America and Europe, the sources of most tourism to Mexico. The search for 'discovery' in the era of global tourism is not confined to wilderness areas, or wildlife expeditions, but also takes the form of new kinds of consumption, including tourist recreation, which in the process of transforming nature also transforms peoples' lives. In measuring the moral compass of these different forms of ecotourism one should be at least as much concerned with their indirect consequences, such as changes in development policy and the political demands generated by Mexican citizens exposed to mass tourism, as with the immediate effects, such as changes in land use and coastal defences. People, many of them from outside the area, have attachment to the places represented by the different forms of ecotourism I have discussed, but do they 'belong' to them? In what sense have they 'chosen' the way of life associated with place, and does the existence or otherwise of choices make these places more or less sustainable?

Throughout the coastal zone dedicated to tourism, we find evidence of the way the tourist economy has structurally transformed the environment. This is apparent from the pivotal economic role which nature affords in both tourism development and the local subsistence economy. The relatively buoyant labour market in areas like Playa Del Carmen has attracted people to work in the tourist sector, and served to reduce local peoples' cyclical dependence on

subsistence agriculture and the village *milpa* (maize) zone. Tourism has created what is, in effect, a parallel and dominant economy, based on the tourist dollar, and the vicissitudes of the North American and European vacation seasons. In terms of the natural environment, the extraordinary invasive capacity of tourism has privatized the shoreline, giving local people little access to the beaches that under Mexican Federal Law are everybody's property. At the same time as the shoreline has been effectively privatized, access to the marine environment, through dive centres, cruise ships and offshore facilities, has also been partially 'privatized'. This was once an 'open access' resource, accessible to fishing communities, and local people, but today it has become much more socially differentiated according to peoples' 'ability to pay'. There is little doubt that whatever the contribution to the matrices of economic growth these are scarcely 'sustainable' places.

The emergence of global resorts and eco-parks, all claiming to be concerned with environmental protection, forces us to examine some of the fundamental distinctions that are made between 'nature' as pristine wilderness and the managed nature of environmental protection. What are the ethical implications of branding nature in the form of 'Green-washing': using positive ethical associations surrounding conservation and sustainable development discourses, to raise the 'quality' of the marketable product – in this case different forms of 'managed nature'?

First, it is unclear whether a clear distinction can be made between human, *produced* nature, in places such as eco-parks, and protected natural areas. As we saw, to the south of the 'Mayan Riviera' lies a large Global Biosphere Reserve, Xian Ka'an. There are only two ways of visiting this reserve: by a poor quality dirt road (that very few people take) or via a guided tour, organized by a travel company based in one of the resorts. These guided tours, though of restricted size, provide many of the same activities as those of the eco-parks: snorkelling, floating in the *cenotes* and the night observation of marine turtles. There is also considerable illegal development within the reserve, and few effective planning controls. Although the environmental space occupied by the Biosphere Reserve has not been as thoroughly transformed as that of Xel-Ha and the other parks, it can be argued that Xel-Ha's existence makes it better able to repel further development. It can be argued that the eco-parks have become natural heritage sites in themselves, capable of withstanding saturation tourism, without repelling the more adventurous prospective visitors from visiting areas like Xian Ka'an. Their overall contribution to global sustainability might be significant.

Second, the use of terms like 'sustainability' is entirely dependent on the context in which it is employed; its power is essentially discursive. Much of the impetus for environmental protection on the coast of the Mexican Caribbean comes from the perceived need to internalize environmental costs, and to minimize the negative environmental effects of development. The interest of a minority of tourist entrepreneurs in cleaner, 'greener' tourist facilities is distinguishable from the wider questions of nature protection in the region. We do not know whether the tourists who visit the coast, and express an interest in the environment, are more concerned with the environmental standards in their hotels and swimming pools, or with the welfare of the colonies of dolphins and marine turtles. It is likely that 'eco-tourists' come in various guises, and that the policy discourses surrounding sustainability and 'nature' have appeal to different types of tourist. In addition, the way in which Mayan culture is invoked in many of the new tourist discourses is beginning to lead to a 'third' discourse about nature. This

seeks to identify traditional forms of sustainable livelihood practiced by the Maya, and associates them with 'Mayan' views of nature.

It is clear that the different temporal dimensions, in which these policy discourses are employed, are paralleled by spatial dimensions. The domain of human choice and consumption is heavily contested, and 'eco-tourism', however rhetorical, is a convenient label on which to hang contrary messages. 'Nature' and 'Natural' places can be used by economists to suggest something that the market might help preserve, as well as something which is destroyed. This is the logic of tourist Eco-Parks. Other approaches to environmental management seek to regulate and 'manage' the environment in ways that control access to 'natural' places. This is the logic of the Biosphere Reserve. In practice, of course, the two currents often converge. The only person patrolling the principal beach, on which marine turtles lay their eggs at Xcacel, is an employee of the tourist company developing Xpu-Ha, a hotel complex just a few hundred meters down the coast. It has fallen to commercial developers to provide the policing needed by conservationists, making it difficult to distinguish between their respective interests.

This chapter has argued that we cannot easily draw a line under 'produced' nature, which separates it from the 'natural', in the face of global eco-tourist development, and makes it more or less 'ethical'. Indeed this kind of development is designed to blur the very distinction between what is ethically conceived for human subjects and for non-human species. Discourses of the 'natural' increasingly incorporate human concerns with public access and recreation, as well as conservation goals, and need to be understood in terms of the structural processes which affect individual choices and lifestyles. They inevitably communicate a strong normative and 'moral' force. From the 'demand' side they include the ambiguously defined 'eco-tourism', and have served to underline the importance of different spatial and temporal perspectives on the meaning of 'place', 'sustainability' and 'Nature'. The places to which tourists are attracted on the Mexican Caribbean are rarely the locations which evoke the past for the indigenous populations: the places where the native Maya fought off the white populations of Spain and Mexico in the centuries since the Conquest. Moreover, the sustainability of 'place' is even more elusive in the digital age which we are now entering, where not just the poor and ethnic minorities are displaced. In the new digital age we are, in fact, all displaced people and redefining what makes a place 'sustainable' is largely a question of discovering where digital and real, material space combine or conflict.

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