DEVELOPING A GLOBAL ECOTOURISM NETWORK THROUGH A FRAMEWORK EXPANSION

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to develop the Global Ecotourism Network (GEN) in order for them to attract new members. The case study will be examined through a mixed method approach with interviews as well a survey. The research will be conducted through the humanistic inquiry approach to comprehend the many worldviews that is involved in a global network as well as use myself as the practitioner-researcher due to the experiences gained through an internship at GEN.

The two main topics; the use of network and ecotourism, will be explored through a literature review. The literature review shows a gap in the literature on global networks within the ecotourism industry. This research leads to the theoretical framework, where the framework of Successful International Tourism Networks (SITN) by Morrison, et al. (2004) will be utilized. The framework consists of five elements, but due to the inadequate substance of each element, the framework will be expanded with relevant literature in each element and additionally include Tourism Network Lifecycle (Zehrer & Raich, 2010).

The analysis will apply the expanded SITN framework and implement the case study of GEN. This will explore and develop GEN through the six elements, which the newly expanded SITN framework consists of. The elements entail; GEN's objectives and purpose, the organizational structure and leadership of GEN, GEN's resourcing, member engagement, benefits and inter-organizational learning, and GEN's lifecycle.

The expanded framework enlightens areas where GEN needs to focus in order to become more attractive for potential new members. The elements were found to be useful to enlighten different aspects of GEN's development opportunities. However, it does lack in areas within the organizational structure and leadership, communication system and development of member relationships.

Keywords: Tourism network development, ecotourism, global network, tourism network membership, Successful International Tourism Network framework, Tourism Network Lifecycle.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

New networks are appearing every day, where the social media scene has made it easy for people with a common interest to connect. New information- and connection platforms have evolved with the development of social media and smart mobile applications, which has enabled internal and external relationships to develop across industry, people, and companies (Sandstrøm, 2012).

Sandstrøm (2012) further explains that through open and honest relationships we can create great value amongst people, politicians, society and companies. There is a need for experiences and knowledge that inspire us and communicate with us, requiring a new form of strategic communication. Networks and member involvement can lead to stronger leadership, increased sharing of knowledge and more creative innovation. All networks are different, involving different strategies and resources. Some networks are more formal and complex than others, creating a competitive advantage in terms of knowledge creation and innovation. Examples of such networks are found within the tourism industry where networks can assist the development within a destination.

Tourism is a service industry where management is focused on being efficient and effective, and this can be accomplished by exchanging knowledge between different organizations (Otto & Ritchie, 1996). Networks can help members with an improved understanding of tourism destination development and management (Conway & Cawley, 2012).

There is no official definition of ecotourism, but it is most commonly defined as *"responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education"* (TIES Website, 2015). The ecotourism industry is growing each year due to an increase in climate awareness and concerns the effect that mass tourism has on the environment, according to the 'Ecotourism Market – Global Industry Analysis, Size, Share, Growth, Trends and Forecast 2015-2023' (Transparency Market Research, 2015). This market research further shows an increase in ecotourism businesses despite the fact that ecotourism can be done in many ways and there is a great deal of differing opinions about it.

A functional network for ecotourism, using new technology, could provide knowledge including how to improve the involvement and participation of local communities, necessary policies, marketing tools, information about sustainable building constructions, and eco-friendly resources and supplies etc.

Starting a professional network for a group within tourism is challenging due to the demand for resources and the requirement of committed people to support the network. This is not only important in the

beginning of the startup, but must be a continuous effort in order to recruit members and keep them interested. It needs to be beneficial for the members to be a part of the network and contribute by sharing their experiences and knowledge. Baggio & Cooper (2010, p. 1758) argue that *"Sharing is power"* and by sharing information and experiences amongst peers, the industry can avoid common mistakes. This process is crucial in a network for it to evolve and reach as many people as possible.

This thesis will use a case study about the newly formed *Global Ecotourism Network,* referred to as GEN, and explore the necessary requirements for this network to be successful and sustainable, and how to attract new members within the ecotourism industry.

GEN's mission is to gather the world's ecotourism industry using a platform for sharing knowledge and peer discussion regarding new technology, methods, and tools under one umbrella. The board GEN envisions this network as a think tank to help the ecotourism industry avoid common mistakes. The board identifies the involved actors in the ecotourism industry as the world's national- and regional ecotourism associations and networks, academicians, indigenous people, global operators, and professionals within ecotourism (GEN Website).

Through the research for the requirements of a successful global ecotourism network, a gap in the literature was identified in regards to ecotourism networks that work on a global level. Morrison et al. (2004) has developed the framework that includes success factors for international tourism networks. The framework does not have a title in the article, but for the sake of getting an understanding of the framework, the title will be: *Successful International Tourism Network framework* and will be referred to as the SITN framework throughout this case study. This framework is viewed as the best fit for this case study. However, it is not adequate if we are to get the full picture of building a strong ecotourism network since the framework was used as a superficial success indicator for the researched networks. Additionally, the framework was built for international tourism networks and not directed towards the ecotourism industry.

This gap in the existing framework makes the argument for conducting further research in the deeper meaning of ecotourism regarding values, financial setup, relationships within the network, and a network's lifecycle. The new expanded theory developed in this case study will lead to a stronger network framework that can contribute to GEN's development plan decision making to attract new members.

Creating a new network takes time and effort and there were many challenges connected to the startup of GEN. This underlines the importance of why it needs a strong foundation and strategy to support it.

A successful network needs members who participate in order to function. The potential members must have an interest in being part of the network and a desire to participate, otherwise there would be no

purpose of having an ecotourism network. Therefore, it is important to investigate the motivation, and what areas of support are needed for the potential participants to get committed to the network.

There are a great number of academic articles and books about networks and how relationships across companies can build a stronger industry, but not many articles regarding building an attractive global umbrella tourism network within a specific tourism industry.

There are many industries where networks can generate innovation, which is why this topic is not only interesting within ecotourism but for other tourism industries that are building a global network. This thesis will investigate the foundation of the network success factors and lifecycle and explore the motivation of networks through academic search within tourism networks as well as relationship development. The case study about GEN will create a foundation for a sustainable network for ecotourism, and therefore, the problem statement is as follows:

What development decisions should the Global Ecotourism Network make to attract members based on an expansion of the framework for Successful International Tourism Networks?

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The thesis consists of eight chapters and will be divided up as followed; Chapter 1 - Introduction, will give the reader an introduction and lead to the problem statement that forms the purpose of this thesis. Chapter 2 – Methodology, will take the reader through the thesis' construction as well as applied methods. Chapter 3 – Literature Review, will provide an understanding of the two main topics of this thesis; networks and ecotourism. This will lead to Chapter 4 – Theoretical Framework that will apply the framework by Morrison, et al. (2004) and expand on it with relevant literature. Chapter 5 – Case Presentation: Global Ecotourism Network presents the case study. In Chapter 6 – Analysis, the data collection together with the expanded framework will be analyzed. This leads to Chapter 7 – Discussion, where the applied framework will lay the basis for the discussion. Chapter 8 – Conclusion will provide an answer to the problem statement based on the applied research and this chapter will also include further research.

CHAPTER 2 - METHODOLOGY

The methodology chapter will take the reader through the thesis' construction and describe how the researcher will justify the choice of mixed- methods. The research approach that has been applied is a case study approach together with the *humanistic inquiry* approach, to create an adequate research strategy to answer the problem statement.

To ensure credibility, the thesis will include empirical data collection as a set of qualitative and quantitative data, in addition to relevant theories. Through this data collection and gathered theories, we will make the thesis as reliable as possible (Saunders, et al., 2009). There are many ways of doing research, which is why it is important to describe how this thesis's research is obtained (Snape & Spencer, 2003). Lastly, the methodology will examine the quality evaluation of findings, which includes Hirschman's (1986) criteria elements.

2.1 PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

The research philosophy is necessary to understand how the researcher develops knowledge and the nature of that knowledge. Additionally, this is to show the researcher's worldview, which is called paradigm. The purpose of this project is to explore the development of GEN in order for it to become attractive to new members.

The concept of paradigm is highly relevant. In every field of the research there is a set of mutual understandings, which composes a paradigm. Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill explains that "*... a paradigm is a way of examining social phenomena from which particular understandings of these phenomena can be gained and explanations attempted*." (Saunders, et al., 2009, p. 118) The paradigm affects how the thesis will define and explain the research issues. This thesis will apply a mixed method, which according to Denscombe (2008) is defined as a *third paradigm* for social research and is a particular benefit amongst research paradigms that are based on communities. The researcher of this thesis sees the global ecotourism society as a form of community based on the common interest of ecotourism, the environment and conservation.

The *humanistic inquiry* approach will be applied because of the personal perspective that I am bringing into the case study, as researcher as well as the involved, having different realities, worldviews and values. This approach demands participation of the investigator, which for the humanist is important to get the whole picture and investigate with empathy and intuition to comprehend the investigated feelings, thoughts, and

beliefs, giving results that are intangible. (Hirschman, 1986) Due to this approach, will I be referring myself in first person throughout this thesis to emphasize on the humanist inquiry approach.

The new network that is being investigated is managed by people from around the world with similar beliefs about the environment, but with different positions, traditions, values and behaviors. Additionally, the target group is also spread worldwide with different worldviews and work areas. This makes it difficult to quantify, which is why I have chosen to apply the humanistic inquiry approach.

2.1.1 ONTOLOGY

Philosophy of science scholars applied the term ontology to explain the nature of what the researcher pursues and must work to understand 'the real cultural world' of the investigated individuals. It concerns issues about the uncertainty in seeing, experiencing, meaning, knowing, and being. (Hollinshead, 2004) This will be utilized by interviewing the board members of GEN as well as organizations that would be considered their target group. Everyone has their own perception based on their values, interests, and position.

The ontological position of this thesis concerns with the beliefs that are held about the world. In this thesis, the ontological position is viewed as multiple context-specific realities, because those involved in a global tourism network come from different backgrounds, countries, knowledge base etc. (Snape & Spencer, 2003)

There are two aspects of ontology: *objectivism,* which characterizes the situation of the existing reality of the social entities and *subjectivism,* which is created from the perception and the following actions of the social actors. Saunders, et al. (2009) explains that within the subjectivism view, the researcher believes that the involved actors have their own opinion about the work and how jobs should be performed. This thesis will take on a subjectivist view, which comes from a social phenomenon that is created by perceptions and actions of social actors. The researcher wishes to understand the reality of those involved in the network, which is associated with the term *social constructivism.* Everyone has their own reality, which can lead to different outcomes, which is why the outcome can be different and the situations can vary. It is the researcher's responsibility to explore the subjective reality to understand their actions. (Saunders, et al., 2009)

This study revolves around the potential members and their environment in terms of their need for a network and how to create awareness for their need for GEN. The thesis seeks to understand the members' worldview and explore the management of GEN's ability to reach their members.

2.1.2 EPISTEMOLOGY

The epistemology is the philosophy behind knowing and learning about the reality of the thesis (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The researcher has collected information to illuminate the worldview from both GEN and possible participants in the network through a survey and interviews. The thesis deals with people, which means that the empirical data is based on individual feelings and opinions. This data cannot be measured through numbers, but is analyzed by the researcher with the support of relevant theories and articles, supporting an *interpretivist* view (Saunders, et al., 2009). "*The challenge here is to enter the social world of our research subjects and understand their world from their point of view*" (Saunders, et al., 2009, p. 116) I had a great opportunity to accomplish this challenge due to the internship at Tony Charters & Associates. The interpretivist view is commonly used in business and management research as well as organizational behavior, human resource management and marketing, which is included in the scope of this thesis.

According to Snape & Spencer (2003) it is important to determine the relationship between the researcher and the researched. In this thesis, I worked for GEN as an intern for 6 months, establishing a membership foundation for the organization through social media and emails, which may affect the objectivity of the case study. By creating a relationship with the leaders of GEN, I generated an understanding of the structure, process and the people behind GEN. The work environment was casual, and I was involved in every aspect of the work with GEN as the only full time intern for GEN. My role will be further examined in the section *the role of the practitioner-researcher* later in the chapter*.*

2.2 RESEARCH STRATEGY

The research strategy being applied is the case study method. A case study is defined as: "*… an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the "case") in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident.*" (Yin, 2014, p. 16) This is done to illustrate the actors involved in the case of GEN and their worldview. There can be more variables that can affect the result, relying on multiple sources of evidence. The theoretical position is to be applied, to guide the data collection and analysis. (Yin, 2014)

A case study is used as research strategy when the phenomenon being investigated would be too difficult to study outside of its natural setting (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005). This indicates that the results of a case study would have limited generalizability. The case study includes data collection from various sources, semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and a survey.

The case study will include an exploratory study, which seeks to obtain new insights and clarify a problem, as well as understand the nature of the problem. This means that 'experts' will be interviewed and exploratory research of the literature will be done (Saunders, et al., 2009) Exploratory research can be done through meetings, participation in various activities or other engagements with the investigated individuals (Hirschman, 1986).

In conducting an exploratory research, the researcher should be willing to redirect focus from unexpected results that occur during the research, (Saunders, et al., 2007) allowing the researcher to investigate the case from different angles and keep an open mind.

To explore and answer the problem statement will a mixed method be applied, due to the many aspects and world views of the involved in the case study, and for the outcome to be quantified as credible. Denscombe (2008) argues that one of the reasons for using mixed methods is to create a more complete picture. This is done through a combination of information from different kinds of data or sources.

In networks, there are a great deal of actors involved, which means there are different aspects that need to be considered, which is why *"mixed-method research designs such as this are proposed as a means to gain a better understanding of networks for sustainable tourism"* (Albrecht, 2012, p. 646) This especially is the case with global networks within the ecotourism industry. Here there would be many views, opinions, and circumstances that need to be explored.

Research within the global tourism network is complicated due to the many actors that are involved, which is also the case with GEN. *"Tourism is a large and complex international activity in which businesses in one tourist-generating country have to deal with a welter of tourist-receiving countries in distant corners of the globe.* (Hollinshead, 2004, p. 87)

Therefore, will there be applied interviews with board members of GEN as well as a survey amongst the possible members of GEN to get a complete view of the opportunities and challenges in the development of a global ecotourism network.

The survey strategy gives the option to be more in control of the explored subject, but can furthermore be time consuming to analyze. It is important to limit the number of questions, otherwise the respondent might not complete the survey. (Saunders, et al., 2009)

2.3 LITERATURE RESEARCH

The theoretical point of departure is to demonstrate the scope of academic research within the research field to answer the research questions. It is the foundation of the thesis with existing literature that is relevant to the problem statement. This is done to investigate the meaning and try to make sense of the phenomenon. (Kuada, 2012)

To understand the phenomenon about networks and ecotourism were databases referenced, such as Google Scholar, AAU Library and Copenhagen Library in the search for articles and books.

The theoretical point of departure will be a combination of a literature review and theoretical framework section. The literature review will include the use of networks and the term ecotourism to give the reader an understanding of these two important elements in this thesis. This is done to illustrate the scope of what networks can do, what functions they can have, how they collaborate and how they can be applied as a tool as well as the coverage from the academic literature. Ecotourism is included because of the type of network being investigated, and therefore is it important to understand the background of ecotourism and the possible members of a global network within the industry.

Through the research for the theoretical framework of this case study, traditional network theories did not fit into the newly started global tourism network within ecotourism. There was a gap in the literature regarding international tourism networks within ecotourism. Yet, there were theories such as *Network Analysis* (Shih, 2006)*, Stakeholder Analysis* (Knox & Gruar, 2007)*, and *Network Science* (Baggio, et al., 2010)*, applied within local networks that were mature, in addition to having an actual membership foundation. These theories, concerned with links and relationships between actors, investigated partner- and process-related features that were already established and contained mathematical procedures to calculate the network's relationships and density. Morrison, et al. (2004) argues that global networks are a complex affair and that there is a limited amount of research about them compared to local networks within destinations.

Therefore, the theoretical framework will investigate factors that can be applied to a newly started global tourism network within ecotourism. This thesis investigates a network that want to gather the ecotourism industry under one umbrella organization.

Therefore, I will apply the theoretical framework of Morrison, et al. (2004) and additional literature will be integrated into the framework where relevant. The framework is divided into five factors; (1) *Objectives and purposes*, (2) *Organizational structure and leadership,* (3) *Resourcing,* (4) *Member engagement,* and (5) *Benefits and inter-organizational learning*. There are limitations to Morrison's, et al. (2004) framework, since it consists of overall elements that were used to measure the success factors of the researched networks.

For this case study, is it found that each of these elements are not thorough enough to get a fulfilling understanding of what development decisions GEN should make to attract members. This limitation is the reason that additional relevant literature will be implemented.

As mentioned in Chapter 1 in the introduction, are there not a title for the framework (Morrison, et al., 2004). To create a better understanding, will the thesis refer to it as; *Successful International Tourism Network* (SITN) framework.

An expansion of the SITN framework builds a stronger and more detailed framework, leading toward a strong foundation for a successful global ecotourism network and tries to close the existing gap in the theory about global networks within ecotourism.

Furthermore, the theoretical framework will include the analytical tool; *Tourism Network Lifecycle* to look at the stages in a network's development, consisting of five stages. This tool is included to give an additional idea of what the next step is, in the newly started network, in terms of what brings value and what it takes to get to the next stage and evolve into a successful network.

Although the thesis revolves around a global network, the theoretical framework segment applies research regarding *'local networks',* which is found to be useful in a global network context. (Ortiz & Rivero, 2006) (Albrecht, 2012) (Baggio & Cooper, 2010) (Ramayah, et al., 2011)

This construction will provide an understanding of successful global tourism networks and create an expanded framework for the collected data to be analyzed and thereby answer the problem statement of the thesis. The next step in the methodology is the data collection.

2.4 PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION

The primary data collection was conducted using mixed-method, qualitative and quantitative data. The mixed-method research design creates a deeper understanding of both sides and contributes to the foundation of a strong and successful global ecotourism network.

Qualitative interviews are a tool to support in collecting in-depth information about the applied case that is being researched. There are several types of interview methods; structured interviews, unstructured interviews, in-depth interviews, and semi-interviews. There is also a range of formality and structure that interviews are being categorized by. (Saunders, et al., 2009)

The applied typology of method is semi-structured interviews, which involves having a list of themes and questions that will be covered during the interview, where additional questions can occur, depending on the flow of the conversation. (Saunders, et al., 2009)

The qualitative data collection was done using semi-structured in-depth interviews with 4 board members from Global Ecotourism Network. The quantitative data was conducted through a survey amongst tourism organizations, NGO's, NPO's and private business within ecotourism, sustainable or responsible tourism, followed by semi-structured interviews from three of the participants from the survey.

The interviews were conducted to get a better understanding of GEN's worldview and knowledge as well as possible members of the network. Conversations allowed me to learn about the opinions and visions of the subjects. The survey enabled the chance to get a broader understanding of what networks are used for and if there is a need for them. In this section the empirical data will be described and explained.

The survey was created to get an additional view of how networks are being used and if there was a need for a network such as GEN. A small handful of the recipients were then interviewed to get a deeper understanding of their opinion of networks.

The data that was obtained is viewed as viable data that can be applied to this thesis and this includes information that would not have been obtainable if I had not had my internship at GEN.

2.4.1 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Interviews are often used in case studies that focus on one person, situation or institution. The interviews are done to further develop *inductively,* the grounded theory that is being applied in the thesis through observations and interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008)

The semi-structured interview method was chosen because it enabled the interviewer to use pre-determined topics, yet allowing the interviewees to elaborate or add relevant information.

The semi structured-interviews were performed on two different groups of people. The first was focused on GEN and its board members to discover their view on the future strategy of GEN. The second group of people was made up of potential members of GEN that had answered the survey and signed up for an interview. In this way, they could clarify their need for networks within ecotourism and how they used networks.

TABLE 1: INTERVIEWS FROM BOARD MEMBERS OF GEN

Name:	Position in GEN:	Appendix number:	Date:	Abbreviation:
Glenn Jampol	Chairman	App #1 App #5 App #10	11.12.2015 11.03.2016 18.11.2016	GJ
Tony Charters	Vice President	App #2	17.12.2015	TC
Albert Teo	Board member	App #3	10.03.2016	AT
Masaru Takayama	Board member	App #4	10.03.2016	MT

The interviews among the board members of GEN, can be viewed above in Table 1. The first two interviews with GJ (App #1, 2015) and TC (App #2, 2015) were done during the internship in Brisbane in December 2015. They were conducted for the internship report, which was about the internal challenges that GEN was facing due to the lack of commitment from the founders of GEN. The interviews were also conducted in order to get a more personal aspect and understanding of the leaders of GEN's attitude towards the creation of a new network (Pedersen, 2015)

The interview construction for GJ (App #1, 2015) and TC (App #2, 2015) was focused on GEN and what they had envisioned the network to become. The interviews were divided up into themes with questions about GEN, value creation, the board's role and responsibilities, threats and challenges, and maintaining relationships.

The interviews with AT (App # 3, 2016), MT (App # 4, 2016) and GJ (App #5, 2016) were conducted in March 2016 at the ITB Berlin travel conference (Internationale Tourismus-Börse Berlin). These interviews focused on the motivation behind being a part of GEN, GEN's value for the ecotourism industry, current challenges, how they are innovative, strengths, new partners, and working with other cultures.

The last interview was conducted to get the latest update from GEN, where GJ was asked a few questions by email and this is included in the appendix (App #10 – GJ, 2016). This ensured information about new partnerships, expenses and investors.

TABLE 2: INTERVIEWS FROM SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

Type of organization:	Appendix/ MP3 file number:	Date:	Abbreviation:
Nonprofit Organization	App #6	28.06.2016	NPO
Non-Governmental Organization	MP3 file #1	08.07.2016	NGO
Private business	MP3 file #2	04.07.2016	PB

Table 2 shows the next group of interviews was with participants from the surveys and the interviews were conducted in June and July 2016. They were focused on obtaining a deeper understanding of how networks are used. Three additional interviews with participants from the survey were also conducted. The survey included the option for the participants to provide their contact information if they wished to elaborate upon their answer in a more thorough interview over Skype. Many of the respondents were positive towards being interviewed and many expressed an interest in obtaining the results of the thesis. One sample from each type of industry - NPO, NGO and a private business were chosen for further questioning in an interview. This was done in order to be able to later compare their answers and look for similarities and differences. The interviews have been made anonymous to ensure that the participants' opinions about existing networks would not be exposed.

2.4.2 SURVEY

It was necessary to create a survey amongst organizations, businesses and others that are involved with ecotourism to get an understanding of how potential members view networks and how they are using networks at the moment. This is important, because without members or participants of the network, the network would not exist.

"Stakeholder surveys can be used to allow an organization to gather and analyze different opinions and assessments from a range of perspectives." (Anheier, 2005, p. 265)

The survey was distributed by e-mail. The respondent's' contact information was gathered through a comprehensive database, which I created while working for GEN. This database consisted of 59 organizations that were involved with ecotourism, responsible or sustainable tourism. In total, 1372 emails were sent to

organizations and members of the organization. 10 organizations had posted their members contact information, which included Swedish Ecotourism - Nature's Best certified operators, AITO, Italian Association, BAAT, TEATA, ABEATA, Georgian Ecotourism, Ecotourism Society of India, Association of Bhutanese Tour Operators and Alaska Wilderness Recreation & Tourism Association. The members are tour operators, hotel owners and DMO's and this was found to be a balanced list from many parts of the world. However, not all email addresses were up to date and therefore one out of ten emails were not received.

An online survey website was applied to collect responses (Survey Monkey). The link to the survey was included in the email for the recipients to respond. 70 people responded to the survey and most of the respondents worked within the tourism businesses. The survey answers have been made anonymous. The survey answers can be seen in Appendix #9.

The setup of the survey questions (App #8 – survey questions) was first and foremost to get information about the recipients to compare and explore differences between the types of organizations. This included the size of the organization, which is divided up by company category from SMEs businesses (Small- and medium-sized enterprises), which was collected from the European Commission website. This is shown in the Table 3 below:

TABLE 3: SIZE OF SMEs BUSINESSES

Company category:	Number of employees:
Medium-sized	< 250
Small	< 50
Micro	< 10

Source: (European Commission Website)

The following questions were asked to obtain information about what type of information they already received through networks and what networks they were members of.

The next questions investigated the relevant information within a network for the organizations and business owners. This will help further illuminate what the future members of GEN will need to be able to attract the largest number of members. Thereafter, the survey participants were asked how much these organizations and businesses spent on membership fees. This would be relevant to explore the total amount

that they spent on membership fees and their willingness to spent money on network. This was important to investigate if this would be a possibility for GEN to implement in the future development.

The 70 responses cannot be used to generalize the ecotourism industry, but rather to gather information about behavioral patterns that can provide insight into the exploratory research. This will be an interpretation of the data and not a presentation of them.

2.4.3 THE ROLE OF THE PRACTITIONER-RESEARCHER

When working for the organization that is being studied as a case study, is it important to take the role of the practitioner-researcher. This creates great opportunities to pursue research and makes it easier to access information that an outside researcher would have difficulties getting. Yet, it is important to be aware of the assumptions and preconceptions that can occur. Furthermore, the practitioner-researcher may forget to ask basic questions to the applicable company because they may be taken for granted by an insider. (Saunders, et al., 2009)

I came across this organization during the 9th semester of my internship in 2015 at Tony Charters & Associates in Brisbane, Australia. My boss, TC, was the Vice President of GEN and hired me to help build up the GEN with help and guidance from the Chairman, GJ. GJ was stationed in Costa Rica where he owns and manages two sustainable hotels and a coffee plantation. My job was to help build up GEN's brand through social media and contact organizations around the world as well as writing a report on the current state of ecotourism and collecting data for a database over the world's ecotourism organizations.

Having to work with the organization and board members, gave me an insight into their organizational structure and workflow, and the opportunity to identify a great deal of the challenges that GEN was facing in developing the network. GEN wanted to create a platform for its members to share knowledge and get ideas for developing their destination as well as avoid some of the most common mistakes. The purpose was to help the ecotourism industry get intrigued, and provide it with information about their experiences and dilemmas.

It all created the opportunity to gain knowledge about the network, board members, strategy and much more. I functioned as the contact person, research assistant and attended the weekly meetings with the Chairman and Vice President. I developed a close relationship with the Chairman and the Vice President and this can lead to a bias. This bias will be discussed in further detail in the *Ethics* section later in this chapter. The knowledge that was obtained will be applied in the analysis to provide a deeper understanding of the strategic elements that are included.

The three primary empirical data methods will be implemented in the elements of the expanded SITN framework and create a comprehensive view on the development of GEN to attract participants.

2.5 SECONDARY DATA COLLECTION

The secondary data collection conducted through desk research is primarily websites involving GEN, which included their website and Facebook group. Moreover, a letter to the leader of TIES from the previous committee advisory board is included to provide an understanding of the strained relationship between TIES and GEN's board. This letter was obtained, while I was an intern and provided to me by GJ. Additional information about standard board construction was obtained from a website based on a book about nonprofit boards. (McNamara, 2008)

TIES have developed the definition of ecotourism that scholars commonly refer to and this thesis therefore applies this definition. This definition was found on TIES' website and is commonly available to the public. Further data was used to support the interest and current situation of ecotourism through an article from Forbes about ecotourism (Hoshaw, 2010).

In Chapter 7 – Discussion, it was found to be necessary to show the accessibility of Internet users in the world. This was obtained through a live website, which showed the exact current number. (Internet Live Stats Website, 2016)

2.6. DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

The analysis (Chapter 6) was constructed by implementing the expanded SITN framework to the case study on GEN, which framed the analysis. The collected qualitative and quantitative data was analyzed and interpreted through the theoretical framework. The transcribed interviews, survey and interviews (MP3) were examined through a conceptual lens to discover patterns and themes, which was applicable to the six elements; GEN's objectives and purpose, the organizational structure and leadership of GEN, GEN's resourcing, membership engagement, benefits and inter-organizational learning, and themes that could be analyzed through GEN's lifecycle.

These analyzed elements were further to be discussed in the following chapter; Chapter 7 – Discussion, where the expanded SITN framework also will be applied as a framework. Here the elements that are significant to the problem statement in Chapter 1 – Introduction will be discussed.

2.6 ETHICS

According to Saunders, et. al. (2009) being an employee in the applied organization, while conducting a study about it, can potentially be an ethical problem with respect to the result. Having worked with GEN as an intern has potential ethical issues and can have caused me to be biased in some areas. I have had access to information that a non-employee would not have the possibility of accessing. Furthermore, I have been able to have private conversations with the Chairman and Vice President of GEN. I acknowledge that this can have caused a different result in the research compared to if I did not have this internship at Tony Charters & Associates. There were frequent meetings that contained many discussions and casual talks about GEN's work as well as the ecotourism industry and its challenges. The information that I received from GJ and TC was from their point of view and what they had experienced through their work and relations across the industry. They both have businesses that involve working with ecotourism and sustainable tourism, so they would of course always work towards building relationships that could strengthen their businesses. Additionally, did I receive an invitation to attend the ITB Berlin conference in March 2016. The interviewed board members knew of my close connection to both GJ and TC, which might have caused them to hold back information in terms of being critical of GEN's development.

In the survey and in the interviews with the survey participants, I did not inform the participants of the working relationship with GEN. This was done to ensure the objectivity of the participants' answers.

Furthermore, the names of the survey participants were anonymized in this thesis, yet the organizations' names are known to me. This was done to have the possibility of exploring more thoroughly the different responses from the survey participants. The decision about making the survey anonymous was made to give the organizations an opportunity to be honest regarding the networks that they were already a part of.

2.7 LIMITATIONS

This section is an important reflection about the thesis' limitations (Saunders, et al., 2009).

A part of the applied literature is of an older date and the possible consequences of this should be examined. The world has evolved quickly within communication and relationships due to new technology that makes it easier than ever to communicate on a global scale. Despite the older publication dates of some of the literature, was it found to be applicable for this study case. It is desirable to cite the most recent articles, but it does not mean that the available literature cannot be used if one takes this into account.

As mentioned in the ethics segment earlier in this chapter, do I acknowledge that the employee role in GEN could have created a preunderstanding of the ecotourism industry and therefore, could have introduced bias in terms of challenges for GEN.

There was a language barrier in the interviews with two of the survey participants, namely the private business and NGO, which made it more difficult to understand one another. Furthermore, the sound quality of the NGO interview was poor, making it difficult to hear. The interviews were done over Skype without video, which took away the potential for reading the body language. Due to this language barrier, there were facts that were *'lost in translation'*. The interview with the private business and NGO was not transcribed due to lack of relevance to the case study. However, do they have parts can be applied, which is why they will be attached as MP3 files in the thesis.

In regards to the survey, I had hoped for a greater response from the massive amount of emails that were sent out (1372 emails), but useful information was gathered from those who chose to participate.

In question 7 (App #8 – survey questions) was the option 'Information about tourism trends' not included as an option where earlier in the survey could the participants choose 'networks that provide information about tourism trends' as an option. In question 4 was tourism trends number one, and it would have been interesting to know if the participants would have chosen tourism trends in number 7, if it had been an option.

During this research, has it not been possible to find numbers from 2016 on the development within ecotourism. The most recent is from the Transparency Market Research (2015), but this report would cost over $5000. However, was there information in their introduction to the report, which was applicable. Therefore, was an article from Forbes, written by Hoshaw (2010), applied to give the reader an idea of the growth potential of ecotourism industry.

2.8 DELIMITATIONS

There is a cultural aspect having such a large group of people from all over the world working together. Having people with many types of backgrounds and cultural differences creates a challenge when building up a global network. The different backgrounds are found in the board of directors, as well as the target groups that GEN is trying to recruit as members. The cultural aspect of this case study is broad and would spread the analysis too thin to include with the current areas being explored. Therefore, the thesis will not include the differences between economies, geographical or cultural circumstances that can occur in GEN's

case. Instead, the thesis will illuminate the common interests that are uniting them, such as value creation for members, management methods and relationship building across GEN.

2.9 QUALITY EVALUATION OF FINDINGS

To evaluate, whether the results are reliable, will I apply *the set of criteria of the humanistic inquiry* to assess the quality of the data and the use for them. This method of evaluation is being applied instead of measurements of the validity and reliability of the results, which comes from a positivist view (Hirschman, 1986). As described in the philosophy of science section this case study is built on beliefs and different worldviews that are not elements that can be measured in numbers and boxes. Hirschman's (1986) humanistic inquiry calls for a different method of measuring the results, which is divided into four criteria concepts:

– Credibility

– Transferability

– Dependability

– Confirmability

CREDIBILITY

The applied empirical data, consists of the interviews with a few members of GEN's board, interviews of survey participants, and a survey amongst potential members of GEN. The credibility criteria are included to evaluate the authenticity of the responses (Hirschman, 1986).

GEN's leading board members have been questioned and observed and since they are managing GEN, have the knowledge and ideas for the content of the network as well as the network's direction and values. The close working relationship I had with both GJ and TC, creates a stronger credibility in the information exchange and an understanding of the ecotourism industry.

The interviews with AT and MT, was more formal since I had not interacted with them before the interview but had a great deal of information about them from TC and GJ. This gave some insight about the type of person they were where they were coming from in terms of work and culture. AT and MT gave me safe credible answers that were applicable to my case and yet, the interviews were short and could have been more in depth, including questions about their view on how to attract members.

As mentioned in the primary data collection was the interviews with the survey participants made anonymous to give them the opportunity to be completely honest about the existing networks that they were a part of. The survey participants were made aware of this, and was done in the effort to make the answers more credible.

It is important to acknowledge that the number of participants was not high. The respondents provided ideas and viewpoints on networks, which were applied in this case. The answers are not quantifiable, but can give an indication of the patterns that are emerging in the ecotourism industry towards networks.

The interview with the NPO was perceived as honest and informative. This was a person who had been in the industry for several years and had been involved with networks. It was important to get the perspective of an organization who worked within ecotourism and who had experience with networks. However, the NGO and the private business were less informative. This could be due to the language barrier or lack of experience with networks. Nonetheless, are all these different organizations, within the segment that GEN is trying to reach.

TRANSFERABILITY

The criteria for the concept of transferability considers the ability to apply the manifestation of one phenomenon to another. while acknowledging that no two social contexts are identical. Transferability is the interpretation of the construction and the determination about whether it can be applied in other cases. (Hirschman, 1986)

The construction of this case comes from the expanded SITN framework, which is constructed around a global tourism network within ecotourism. This forms the structure throughout the thesis; in the Chapter 5 – Theoretical Framework, Chapter 6 – Analysis and Chapter 7 – Discussion.

There is a tendency for different industries or people with similar interests to come together because of a common agenda, which can lead to a sharing of ideas. (Sandstrøm, 2012). This can be done across the world (or across national borders) due to the accessibility of communication tools online. The network framework is therefore transferable and does not need to be limited to ecotourism. Ecotourism can be removed as an element and replaced by another type of tourism industry containing a different set of values and beliefs. The setup is therefore perceived as transferable to other case studies about global tourism networks. The expansion of the SITN framework covers, in depth, the necessary strategic elements, as well as the applied methods which are transferable to other newly established global tourism networks and which should be in place to be successful.

DEPENDABILITY

Dependability is the third criteria, which examines the consistency of the human instrument. This term is used to describe the researcher's ability to be dependable. Having only one researchers' interpretation creates a more dependable understanding of the subject's nature. (Hirschman, 1986)

Dependability was achieved through the 6 months of work and cooperation with GJ and TC. Their honesty gave provided me with a clear understanding of values and direction that GEN was aiming towards. Additionally, it supplied an idea of the kind of people working on creating this new network and about their weaknesses and strengths.

CONFIRMABILITY

The final criteria, confirmability, revolves around the researcher's ability to become involved in the topic. *"Hence, the interpretation generated by the researcher is not assumed to be disinterested or value-free, as in the positivist approach."* (Hirschman, 1986, p. 246) The researcher is expected to be supportive and to set up a logical set of conclusions, from the data obtained during the interaction. To determine whether the interpretation is drawn in a logical and unprejudiced manner the humanistic inquiry uses an outside auditor to review the documentation, as well as field notes and methodological diary to confirm the conclusion. The auditor needs to be a researcher within the same field. (Hirschman, 1986)

The involvement with GEN, not only gave me an understanding of GEN and the involved worldview, but also provided the desire to see them develop and reach their mission, to help the ecotourism industry at the same time trying to be realistic about the challenges they are facing.

The requirement for an external auditor to overlook the gathered data, has not been met in this case study. Instead, I had consulted the thesis supervisor, as well as fellow students, about the methodology of this case study and how it was conducted.

In conclusion, the humanistic inquiry method has been implemented to attempt to comprehend the intangible data collection as well as theoretical framework. This case study sheds light on a new network that was designed to develop the ecotourism industry. To get the complete picture of GEN, regarding the board's view as well as the potential members, that GEN wants to attract, the research strategy used was a mixed-

method. I was involved in the case study as a practitioner-researcher during the internship at GEN, providing valuable experiences and knowledge.

In the academic research, a gap was discovered in global international networks within ecotourism, where it was found necessary to expand the existing SITN framework by Morrison, et al. (2004) with additional research within networks, ecotourism, building relationships and a network's lifecycle. This was done to identify the strategic criteria required to be successful.

Despite the limitations in the role of a practitioner-researcher, the benefits have outweighed the disadvantages enabling me to make conclusions based on a solid recommendation, due to evidence including first-hand knowledge of GEN.

CHAPTER 3 - LITERATURE REVIEW

The chapter will, in a brief literature review, look at the definition and use of networks in the tourism industry as well as ecotourism from different academic researchers. This will give the reader the necessary background knowledge behind the meaning of ecotourism, and the reasons why networks are valuable for the ecotourism industry. This will provide the reader with an overall understanding of the grounded research around these two topics. Furthermore, will this section give the reader an understanding of the missing theoretical research specific for a global tourism network theory within ecotourism.

3.1 THE USE OF NETWORKS

The tourism industry is constantly evolving and depends on the quality of customers' service experiences. To improve operations and performances, many turn to networks to create more value to the provided products and services. Every tourism organization has relationships with other entities such as distributors, suppliers, competitors, governments, immigration, customs, lodging and accommodation, and transport. These types of relationships are a collaboration across different types of business in a destination. (Ramayah, et al., 2011) Networks within a destination can create value for the customer if businesses work together and share knowledge. *"Due to the complexity of the tourist product most service companies in a tourist destination are dependent on each another to provide a holistic product to the customer."* (Zehrer & Raich, 2010, p. 1683) In the global perspective, it is becoming more common to use partnership arrangements in local countries, using 'networks', to boost the sustainable economic tourism. Furthermore, it has become more common for national economic organizations within the tourism sector to include networks in their development strategies. (Morrison, et al., 2004)

The term 'network' is complex because of the many different areas and businesses that a network can entail, and while it is a growing concept, there is not a lot of data about international tourism networks contra local tourism networks. Morrison, et al. (2004) investigates the benefits and success factors of international tourism networks. Presenza & Cipollina (2010) finds tourism networks complex, but believes that they can be applied as an effective tool in tourism innovation. Tourism networks are especially important for SMEs because it helps them overcome different types of crisis, such as management-, technical- or construction issues etc. By founding and developing networks, they can create long-term competitiveness for the destination. The participant businesses can become more professional and learn from one another (Zehrer &

Raich, 2010). For example, marketing within a tourism destination can be difficult and researchers have found networking to be an effective and crucial tool to connect tourism businesses through a form of cooperative to share information and resources. (Lemmetyinen & Go, 2009)

Networking is a tool to obtain information in an efficient way to remain competitive in terms of taking into consideration new technology, changing consumption patterns of customers and global economic changes. The definition of a network is: *"... a specific set of linkages among a defined set of actors, with the additional property that the characteristics of these linkages as a whole may be used to interpret social behaviour of the actors involved."* (Mitchell (1969) in Zehrer & Raich, 2009, p. 1685) The aim of networking is associated with information and knowledge transfer and building these relationships can bring a competitive advantage. Morrison, et al. (2004) further explain that networks, which had successfully embedded systems and culture were more likely to preserve inter-organizational learning and knowledge exchange. Their research identified multiple ranges of tourism network types that can be classified according to inter-organizational configuration, organizational type, degrees of formality, the duration of intensity of co-operative relationship between members, the network's function and benefits. These networks can be described *"...as the structure of ties among the actors in a social system; these ties may be based on a range of connectors such as conversation, friendship, economic exchange, collaboration, or information exchange."* (Nohria & Eccles (1992) in Zehrer & Raich, 2009, p. 1685.) The academics exemplify the different kinds of networks within these classifications that could involve; network membership nature, type of exchange or attraction, nature of linkages between members, geographical distribution of the network, and network function or role. The networks can be categorized into formal, semi-formal or informal in nature. (Conway, (1998), Shaw & Conway, (2000) in Morrison, et al., 2004)

Ramayah, Lee & In (2011) explains;

> *"... tourism network is a set of formal, co-operative relationships between appropriate organizational types and configurations, stimulating inter-organizational learning and knowledge exchange and a sense of community and collective common purpose that may result in qualitative and/or quantitative benefits of business activity, and/or community nature relative to building profitable and sustainable tourism destinations."*

> (Ramayah, et al., 2011, p. 413)

Ramayah, Lee & In's, (2011) explanation about tourism networks is not necessarily the only way that a network is constructed, but as Zehrer & Raich (2009) mentions are there different levels of involvement that can affect the network's function.

Having that sense of community across an industry or a group of people with the same interest can bring multiple benefits to a tourism business. This knowledge exchange varies from network to network and there is a lack of research within global networks contra local networks. This thesis will explore this gap and construct a combined framework that can be applied in the study case about GEN in the analysis.

3.2 DEFINITION OF ECOTOURISM

A brief literature review of the definition of ecotourism, is included to provide the reader an understanding of what ecotourism implies to comprehend the worldview of the actors involved in an ecotourism network.

The term 'ecotourism' covers a variety of different operators and areas. The first researcher to define the term as we know it today was Budowski (1976), who focused on tourism and conservation. In the 1980's the term 'Ecotourism' was developed as a reaction to the negative impact that mass tourism had caused to the natural areas (Commonwealth Department of Tourism, 1994). This matter became the starting point of conserving the natural environment with respect to tourism, and began creating a growing interest for avoiding the harm that tourism can bring (Orams, 1995). Ecotourism is perceived the fastest growing area within tourism with an estimated growth rate of 10-15% (Panos, 1997 in Scheyvens, 1999) and therefore twice as high as the global tourism rate in the 1990's that had an overall growth rate of 6%. More recent numbers show an expected increase of the ecotourism industry to grow to 25% of the global travel market by 2016. (Hoshaw, 2010)

The definition of ecotourism has evolved over the years, having had over 30 definitions created by researcher conservationists, and tourism practitioners between 1993-1994 (Dowling, 2000). The most cited and applied definition is made by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES): *"responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education"* (TIES Website, 2015) This definition has been used by researchers such as Conway & Cawley (2012) and Courvisanos & Jain (2006).

Orams (1995) reviews the different interpretations of ecotourism, which are all based on minimizing the negative impact on the natural environment, as well as the recommendation that Eco tourist should commit to the health and quality of the natural attractions. Although the focus of ecotourism is preserving the natural environment, there have been concerns that ecotourism takes advantage of the 'eco-sell' as a marketing instrument and thereby threatens the nature with more tourists. (*Ibid*)

TIES expanded the meaning of ecotourism to clarify by creating these listed principles that should be included in ecotourism activities:

- *"Minimize impact*
- *Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect*
- *Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts*
- *Provide direct financial benefits for conservation*
- *Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people*
- *Raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climate*
- *Support international human rights and labour agreements"*

(TIES, 2006 in Black & Crabtree, 2007, p. 4)

Ecotourism has, long before it was named, been in focus within safaris, camping, hiking, climbing, fishing, boating, canoeing, and cross-country skiing. The term emerged due to the consequences of mass tourism and the focus on nature-based recreation with ambition to minimize or eliminate negative impacts that derived from tourism. (Black & Crabtree, 2007)

Ecotourism has an enormous activity range in products that also includes eco lodges, trekking with indigenous people, birdwatching, whale watching etc. The degree of interest of the individual Eco tourist can vary. Some are more 'hardcore' about ecotourism and some are less passionate. (*Ibid*)

To ensure the quality of ecotourism activities, different certifications have been created to show the Eco tourist the standards of the establishment. This is common in the general tourism industry with the well-known star system and Michelin guidebooks. It has been difficult to determine the quality of an ecotourism activity due the complexity of each ecotourism activity and there have been a few critics to certifications. (*ibid*)

There have, in the last decade, emerged several environmental awards within tourism worldwide to encourage environmental awareness and the consequences that tourism can bring. (Toplis, 2007)

As described, ecotourism covers a variety of areas in the tourism industry, which even after 30 years of the existence of ecotourism, are struggling to determine what good practice is required to qualify as ecotourism. A method to improve the industry and gain knowledge about good practice can be through a strong clear network for sharing knowledge.

This identified gap, which was found in global tourism networks in ecotourism is why the SITN framework (Morrison, et al., 2004) is being applied and added relevant academic scholars' research to fully comprehend the development challenge that GEN is faced with, which Chapter 4 – Theoretical framework will examine.

CHAPTER 4 - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, will Morrison, et al. (2004) SITN framework be applied to investigate the success factors for international networks to discover what an international tourism network within ecotourism should include in order develop and attract participants, which is the foundation of a network. The SITN framework consists of five factors;

1) Objectives and purposes
2) Organizational structure and leadership
3) Resourcing
4) Member engagement
5) Benefits and inter-organizational learning.

The SITN framework is applied to contribute as well as underlying the success factors of networks, and help in identifying the missing areas in the elements within a network. As mentioned earlier, was a gap discovered in the theoretical work within global tourism networks, specifically within ecotourism. There are elements from articles revolving around local tourism network that could be applied, which the theoretical framework will explore. Additional adjustments will be made to the original theory to give a greater understanding of the concept of global tourism networks that are being applied in an ecotourism context.

To further develop the framework, will I incorporate Ortiz & Rivero's (2006) *'Fundamental interrelated components'* into the framework as well as other academic scholars' input to create a wider understanding of networks. Thirdly and lastly, the thesis will include the *'Tourism network lifecycle'* tool to contribute in understanding the developing process and the stages involved in a tourism network.

4.1 SUCCESSFUL INTERNATIONAL TOURISM NETWORKS

Morrison, et al. (2004) applied the framework for success factors for international networks to their findings. This thesis will look further into this framework and add additional understanding about how to analyze a network and what should be present in a startup global network to gain possible members' trust and participation.

The framework is similar to the list of *'Significant factors for successful tourism networking'* created by Zehrer & Raich (2010) that can be seen below in Table 4.

TABLE 4: SIGNIFICANT FACTORS FOR SUCCESSFUL TOURISM NETWORKS

"Significant factors for successful tourism networks
• *Structure and leadership*   • *Establish trust culture*   • *Resourcing*   • *Degree of engagement*   • *Inter-organizational learning*   • *Underlying objectives*   • *Sustainable nature*   • *Lifecycle stage"*

(Hamle, 2001, Augustyn & Knowles, 2000, Littlejohn et al., 1996, Morrison, 1994 in Zehrer & Raich, 2010, p. 1688)

The factors that are mentioned above acknowledge the same functions as the SITN framework defines except for the lifecycle, which was chosen to include at the end of this chapter.

The thesis will furthermore combine the tool - *'Fundamental Interrelated Components'* into the framework and additionally include academic researchers' findings to support the arguments and make the tool more reliant to expand the five elements of the SITN framework and get a deeper understanding of each element. The organization, "Pact" - Capacity Building Service Group created the tool to develop sustainable networks. It was created by Ortiz & Rivero (2006) for Pact, an organization that helps members of communities to live a healthier life, ensure a dignified living and show the communities a way to take advantage of the natural resources that are sustainable. (Pact Website)

To make the SITN framework more likely to be successful, will the Fundamental Interrelated Components by Ortiz & Rivero (2006), be implemented to support the network's sustainability, which is described below in Table 5.

TABLE 5: FUNDAMENTAL INTERRELATED COMPONENTS

a) *"**Value Creation in Response to Stakeholder Needs** establishes a clear orientation that fosters the offering of services based on network stakeholder demand, which is dynamic over time.*
b) ***Network Fundamentals** are the foundation for network development and growth. Without solid fundamentals (i.e. mandate, vision, network structure, relationships and clear role separation with member organizations, management, etc.), sustainability is tenuous even if the network currently has meaningful financial support.*
c) ***Financial Strategy** is the ability to efficiently align funding sources with network operational and strategic aims. It is the ability to leverage resources on the basis of strong network fundamentals and a solid value proposition."*

Source: (Ortiz & Rivero, 2006, p. 2)

The three components consist of different aspects of a network's contribution to its sustainability and thereby create a competitive advantage. According to Ortiz & Rivero (2006) is the sustainability of a network not merely up to the financial state in the organization, but is furthermore a combination of the organization's clear vision, leadership, commitments, flexibility and adjustment to environmental changes, diversification, innovation, and management practices.

4.1.1 OBJECTIVES AND PURPOSES

The first part of the SITN framework is objectives and purposes, which includes goals, geographical area, intention of the provided knowledge, who should be the users of the network in terms of local, regional, national or international area, and the ability to eliminate issues that can interfere with the network's purpose. Additionally, is about the ecotourism industry to delineate the possibilities for ecotourism networks and what value lies behind this type of tourism industry.

Ecotourism has the potential to contribute to communities' economic wealth as well as delivering ecologically sustainable development to destinations that have a unique natural environment. (Courvisanos & Jain, 2006) *"Ecotourism is about the preservation of the environment and promoting tourism such that the tourist does not harm the environment."* (Courvisanos & Jain, 2006, p. 132) It is developing into an industry

that is not only 'Eco' for marketing reasons to attract more guests, it also brings the 'feel good factor' for preserving the environment. (Courvisanos & Jain, 2006)

Ecotourism has shown to contribute to the development of local economies in developing countries (Fennell (2009) in Conway & Cawley, 2012). In 1965 ecotourism was defined by four pillars *"Minimum environmental impact; minimal impact on and respect for host cultures; maximum economic benefits to the host country's grassroots; and maximum 'recreational' satisfaction to the participating tourist."* (Fennell, 2009, p. 373 in Conway & Cawley, 2012) Conway & Cawley (2012) looked into a regional tourism networks within ecotourism, which showed that networking within ecotourism brings a range of positive outcomes. This research focused on networking within a certain local program called Greenbox and was established to create a positive image of ecotourism by promoting and marketing the area. A global network within ecotourism, if done correctly, could lead to destinations becoming more sustainable and environmentally conscious by learning from others. Conway & Cawley (2012) concluded the regional tourism network within ecotourism to be a success.

The first component of the Fundamental Interrelated Components concerns value creation in response to stakeholder needs. This is included to ensure that during the future development of the network, it will be based on value creation with the focus on stakeholders' needs. Creating that value comes from a *"… clear understanding of members' needs, identification of innovative alternatives for solving problems, leverage of synergies among stakeholders for higher impact execution and documentation and dissemination of best practices and lesson learned. "* (Ortiz & Rivero, 2006, p. 4). There are different methods to create value for the network and they can be developed through the collaboration with new partnerships, observing and evaluating donors' projects, documenting the knowledge and stories of members, and implementation of operational structures. Furthermore, the network must be aware of the members need and its development. *"If members need change, the network must change (dissolve, redefine itself, etc."* (Ortiz & Rivero, 2006, p. 5) This understanding of members needs can lead to loyal and active members if done right. *"The effective and active engagement of members in a trust culture with associated values and attitudes has been identified as a success factor."* (Morrison, et al., 2004, p. 201) There must be a sense of community and belongingness for the network to be successful. Furthermore, is it important to create an understanding about the structure of the network, which can help the member gain knowledge about the knowledge-sharing process (Hoarau, et al., 2012).

One of the challenges for a global tourism network contra a tourism destination network, is that tourism destination networks are related to a certain geographical location that are built on the relations among the

tourism actors. This development within a destination network is based on common values, knowledge and interpretations of their environment, which a global network does not possess. (Hoarau, et al., 2012)

4.1.2 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE AND LEADERSHIP

This section involves how the organizational structure and leadership is contributing to the purpose and recognizes the possibilities of creating a community of learning.

Ortiz & Riveros (2006) mention in their second component within a network's sustainability; network fundamentals, which are the key assets that facilitate and preserve a network's operations. The foundation of the network's value is based on the purpose of the network and having the actors involved know their responsibilities and roles in the network. The network must remain neutral and must not compete in any way with its members, nor pursue a competitive advantage that does not benefit all members. Morrison, et al. (2004) explains that the network's structure is multidimensional and complex by nature and the benefits can mean different things to the participants, which is why the purpose of the global network needs to be clear and structured.

According to Morrison, et al. (2004), has literature not been able to provide an understanding of the management behind networks; *"While it has been possible to summarize a range of associated success factors, analysis of literature has failed to identify real sense of managerial understanding of how tourism networks should be organized to best advantage"* (Morrison, et al., 2004, p. 198) The statement from Morrison, et al. (2004) supports the reason research has been unable to provide this understanding, which could be that networks are organized differently, have different agendas, different opinions etc.

4.1.3 RESOURCING

To build a successful international tourism network, the founders need to have the ability to handle the financial, human and physical resources.

The third component in the Fundamental Interrelated Components is the financial strategy, where the network needs to include areas such as, strategic and financial planning, diversification of products and services, cost management, developing opportunities and resources. It includes not only funding but leadership, visioning and shows the bigger picture (Ortiz & Rivero, 2006). This is also an element that Morrison, et al. (2004) mention that the resources in networks can vary within financial, human and physical

parameters, and identifies five types of financial funding that can occur in networks. This is shown below in Table 6.

TABLE 6: TYPES OF NETWORK'S FINANCIAL FUNDING

1. *Public funds and industry sponsorship.*
2. *Public funds and through its members.*
3. *Public funds.*
4. *Members and sponsorship funding.*
5. *Membership, sponsorship, and voluntary contribution in kind.*

(Morrison, et al., 2004, p. 201)

In the early stages of a network's development, where number 4 and 5 is relevant, it is critical that the resources of the physical and "in kind" are in order. There needs to be people who want to put in the time and effort to create the network. This does not only mean members contribute with money, but resources the members have available in terms of knowledge and create awareness about the network for potential members. (Morrison, et al., 2004)

In the Morrison, et al. (2004) case studies, they concluded that it was a motivational factor for the members to pay membership fees, because it led to organizational engagement and a stronger commitment to achieve the network's purpose.

4.1.4 MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

The participation and engagement by members in a network is crucial and it takes a great deal of work to achieve. *"This is achieved through a comprehensive understanding, manipulation and management of a diverse set of member motivations including economic, social and psychological."* (Morrison, et al., 2004, p. 200)

A network's connection happens through knowledge sharing, which the following will explain. The next section will illuminate member's cooperation, and introduce Morgan & Hunt's *Commitment-Trust Theory* (1994), and Sandstrøm's (2012) thoughts on managing relationships in general networks.

According to Baggio & Cooper (2010), knowledge transfer, social embeddedness and cultural variables are key elements of global competitiveness for regions and nations. Tourism is a service industry and it is important to focus on how to be efficient and effective through information and knowledge exchange

between different organizations. By achieving this, the applicable destination can become better at attracting more guests. The sharing of knowledge that is achieved through networks is being recognized as an important tool to tourism innovation. Not all participants are equally important in relation to the network and can be divided into primary and secondary participants. (Baggio & Cooper, 2010)

The relationship between those involved in the network is extremely important for its survival. Networks are a number of *'fluid'* relationships because they change over time (Pavlovic, 2003 in Zehrer & Raich, 2010) and a good relationship will motivate the participants to engage and share knowledge. Baggio & Cooper claims that *"...'sharing is power' and creates 'communities of knowledge' at the destination level."* (Baggio & Cooper, 2010, p. 1758) By having this cooperation across one industry can help them improve and make the network stronger. *"Networking relates to the communication that takes place between the members of the network in order to attain the desired ends."* (Lynch & Morrison, 2007, Michael, 2007 in Conway & Cawley, 2012, p. 398). The flow of information and quality of knowledge is highly relevant for the general behavior of the system within a network, which can affect productivity, innovation and economic growth (Baggio & Cooper, 2010). It is important to remember that networks have different phases of participation, which can evolve over time (Conway & Cawley, 2012).

Networks are rarely self-contained entities and will overlap and have relationships with other networks or actors. Many networks connect with the involved actors across a destination to develop a tourism product value chain(s), which is not the case with global tourism networks due to their global structure and aim. (Albrecht, 2012)

Relationships in a network are divided up in *Strong Ties* and *Weak Ties,* which are characterized by different elements. Strong ties would be the type of relationship that a strong network would aim for. This is described below:

> *"Networks which are characterized by actors who are linked to each other by a network, which for instance builds on similar attitudes, values or social status, are 'strong ties. Strong ties are characterized by...(1) a sense of that the relationship is intimate and special, with a voluntary investment in the tie and desire for companionship with the partner; (2) an interest in frequent interactions in multiple context; and (3) a sense of mutuality of the relationship, with the partner's needs known and supported."* (Walker, Wasserman & Wellman, 1994, p. 57 in Zehrer & Raich, 2010, p. 1694)

This form of connection characterizes the relationship that is desired in a strong network. Unlike strong ties, weak ties are characterized by heterogeneous actors and involve few intimate exchanges. Their relationship is more infrequent and operates within different areas. *"Studies reveal that the exchange of information occurs more often among homogeneous actors than among heterogeneous actors of a network."* (Bozeman, 2004, David & Keely, 2003 in Zehrer & Raich, 2010, p. 1694). Weak ties are more likely to link members of different small groups than strong ties, which tend to concentrate within particular groups. (Zehrer & Raich, 2010) Networks should strive to create *'strong ties',* because they tend to benefit the development of socio-emotional relationships that can create solidarity, confidence and security within project-supported cooperation. Furthermore, Zehrer & Raich (2010) concludes that there is a need for networks within tourism, because it is a win-win for all involved.

There are three types of cooperation, which are categorized under *'Horizontal cooperation', 'Vertical cooperation'* and *'Diagonal (or lateral) cooperation'* (Zehrer & Raich, 2010, p. 1692) and will focus on horizontal cooperation within global networks, which is a cooperation among companies at the same level of production, due to GEN's members, which are on the same level of production. This is becoming more common in contemporary tourism where cooperation can help in overcoming start-up challenges. (Zehrer & Raich, 2010)

The cooperation within a network requires trust and commitment, which takes time. By sharing one another's experiences and knowledge there is a greater chance of building stronger business amongst the members. The participation within a network can vary and it is up to the network to encourage their members to participate. Ramayah, Lee & In (2011) applies Morgan & Hunt's (1994) *Commitment- Trust Theory* in their research within a tourism network among tour operators to test the hypothesis of importance of trust, commitment and collaboration. This was to discover what was important when trying to create successful inter-organizational relations. These hypotheses confirmed that communication and commitment have an impact on the business collaboration. It included five key elements: *Tourism network collaboration*, *Trust, Commitment, Communication* and *Collaboration extent*. These 5 elements can be applied to examine the success of the tourism networks' performance.

Tourism networks' collaboration occurs when there is a form of synergy that can contribute to the resources of developing tourism products. If this is to be done successfully, the network's participants must realize their common interrelationship and be willing to share information, employ in the greater picture, and be more constructive in solving problems (Ramayah, et al., 2011).

Trust is the relationship's foundation. A network must believe that a partner will uphold the expectations and not take unexpected actions, which may lead to an unfavorable outcome. Additionally, is it important to be honest and maintain the ability to be credible, and believe that the partner has the capability to act in the best possible way. (Ramayah, et al., 2011)

Commitment is another element that benefits tourism networks, which involves the participants maintaining a long-term relationship with in order to generate benefits for the participants' relationships. To encourage the commitment, the participants must share a common goal and face the same type of issues in their business, which would encourage them to invest in collaboration. (*Ibid*)

Communication amongst the organization is crucial for a tourism network. This is done through exchange of information or know-how, enabling the participants to achieve a mutual understanding. This can be done in a formal or an informal manner of sharing, which was mentioned earlier by Morrison, et al. (2004) and Ramayah, Lee, & In (2011). Miscommunication can lead to conflicts and usually happens during stressful times (Ramayah, et al., 2011).

Collaboration extent appears when there is cooperation amongst the participants, and a mutual understanding of one another's needs through collective support and respect. The different levels of collaboration are viewed from weak to strong. Communication and commitment have a direct impact on business collaboration within a network. (*Ibid*)

According to Sandstrøm (2012), it has never been more accessible to join the relationship economy through the internet, social media platforms and apps for smartphones to create communication platforms. This has brought different communities closer together and made it easier to achieve a common goal. No networks are identical, and it takes resources, clear strategy and good leadership to draw benefits from developing networks and participating in them.

Sandstrøm (2012) sees *authenticity, trust, proximity, openness* and *community* as elements in developing functioning and value-adding relationships:

Authenticity - as a participant is it important to contribute with something real that can benefit the network. The network wants real experiences, knowledge and stories that speak directly and equally. This is a tool that businesses can include in their strategic communication. (Sandstrøm, 2012)

Trust - is another key element for businesses to participate in networks, which also was one of the elements that was mentioned earlier in the commitment-trust theory. Trust needs to be earned and maintained,

meaning that the network cannot expect that the members will have trust and faith in the goal immediately. (Sandstrøm, 2012)

Proximity - is the third element, which can be a challenge for most businesses. They want information that makes sense, is clear and real, as well as feedback from a 'real live' person to affect the service of the network. (*ibid*)

Openness - includes the ability to be available and transparent. The information should be accessible and easy to understand and digest. (This is a significant aspect in the global networking sense.) It is important that the network is able to *'put themselves in their members' shoes'* and understand their point of view. It is about placing the information in the right place and in the right amount. (*ibid*)

Community - this is relevant for the base of the relationship, that there is a sense of community amongst the members. In involves the business's identity, culture and products. This can additionally involve development of new products or services that invite dialog amongst peers. More and more businesses even encourage competing in peer-to-peer networks to further develop existing products and services. (*ibid*)

4.1.5 BENEFITS AND INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

The benefits and inter-organizational learning involves the center of the organization and network's members connecting in a formal and informal supportive infrastructure to assist in the inter-organizational learning and exchange, giving the possibility of becoming qualitative and/or quantitative benefits.

In Table 7 below Morrison, et al. (2004) describes the different benefits to a tourism destination that can be achieved through successful networks and is categorized into three subjects; Learning and exchange, Business activity, and Community.

TABLE 7: BENEFITS OF NETWORKS TO BUILDING PROFITABLE TOURISM DESTINATIONS

Learning and exchange	*Knowledge transfer*
	Tourism education process
	Communication
	Development of new cultural values
	Accelerating speed of implementation of support agency initiatives
	Facilitation of development stage of small enterprises

Business activity	Co-operative activities, for example, marketing, purchasing, production
	Enhanced cross-referral
	Encouraging needs-based approaches, for example, staff development, policies
	Increased visitor numbers
	Best use of small enterprise and support agency resources
	Extension to visitor season
	Increased entrepreneurial activity
	Inter-trading within network
	Enhanced product quality and visitor experience
	Opportunities for business development interventions
	More repeat business
Community	Fostering common purpose and focus
	Community support for destination development
	Increases or reinvents a sense of community
	Engagement of small enterprises in destination development
	More income staying locally

(Source: Adapted from Lynch et al. (2000) based on a review of Adam (1994); Buhalis (1994); Buhalis and Main (1996); Evans (1999); Hankinson (1989); Houghton and Tremblay (1995); Huang and Stewart (1996); Litteljohn et al. (1996); Lowe (1988); Lynch (2000); Morrison (1994), 1996. in Morrison, et al., 2004, p. 198)

These benefits depend on the network, its purpose and whether its members are participating and contributing to the network. The substance of the shared knowledge cannot be foreseen, but in terms of global tourism networks it is mainly the learning and exchange of knowledge that is important. It is then up to the participants to take into consideration the use of it or not to benefit their business activity and/or community. It does not mean that every benefit will be achieved. (Morrison, et al., 2004)

To analyze the international networks Morrison, et al. (2004) demonstrate the international network *functions, benefits and success* factors in their research to create a clear focus within the type of networks of academic, private and public/private.

The core of a network's function and benefits factors is learning and exchange of knowledge, which depends on how they create knowledge and share it to in the end enhance innovation and market development by

building a stronger knowledge base. In Table 8 below is the different types of networks' functions and benefits described for each type of network.

TABLE 8: TOURISM NETWORKS' FUNCTIONS AND BENEFITS

	Academic	Private	Public/Private
Learning and exchange	Collaboration for the creation and dissemination of new knowledge	Peer learning and knowledge sharing	Peer and partner learning and transfer of knowledge
Business activity	Through more increased understanding and "perfect" knowledge, impacts at policy, agency business and societal levels	Effective use of pooled resources and resource leverage contributes to enhance innovation and market development.	Support of an umbrella organizations contributes to the stimulation of co-operative practices to enhance innovation and market development
Community	Provides for a sustainable sense of community and active engagement in tourism destination development.	Facilitates engagement of micro and small enterprises in sustainable tourism destination development at community level.	Foster a private/public sector community including SMEs with a common purpose in terms of tourism destination development.

(Morrison, et al., 2004, p. 200)

There are different types of functions and benefits of a network, depending on what type of international network that is being interpreted. This thesis will be focusing on the academic, private, and the public/private networks, since a combination of these benefits could be applied in the case study of GEN, due to the desire to become an umbrella organization that covers all functions. These benefits contribute to a network's foundation of a successful global ecotourism network.

The academic network gives the academic world the chance of collaborating with one another or expose new findings from research. Furthermore, can it create connections and make way for new research in a community. (Morrison, et al., 2004)

The private networks are not only an opportunity to get in contact with other types of organizations and gain commercial advantage. Private networks can help companies achieve new resources and learn about marketing, business development activities and public sector grant funding. (*Ibid*)

The public/private network can be applied for regional, national or international economic development with the assistance of public sector resources directed at tourism destination development. (Morrison, et al., 2004)

4.2 NETWORK LIFECYCLE

The concept of lifecycles is to assess networks and their dynamics to be able to make an onwards development for the different phases the network goes through. The network's process is analyzed stretching from market entry to market exit and is a valuable instrument for analyzing the stages of network development. (Zehrer & Raich, 2010)

FIGURE 1: TOURISM NETWORK LIFECYCLE
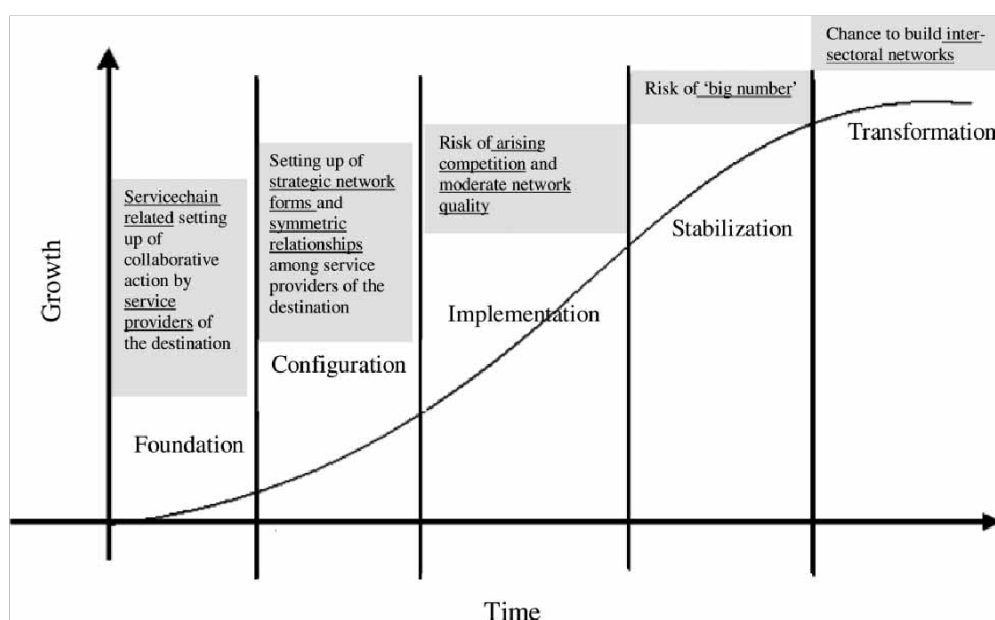
Source: (Zehrer & Raich, 2010, p. 1700)

The tourism network lifecycle, which can be viewed above in Figure 1, is an analytical tool used to identify the current stage of the tourism network within a destination. This thesis will bring this tool into a global context in the analysis relating to the case study. The tool is applied to look at the dynamics and crucial stages of the network's development. (Zehrer & Raich, 2010)

In the foundation stage, the network will need to attract partnerships and create motivation for cooperation by showing the win-win situation for the stakeholders, thereby creating value for the stakeholder as well as

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the network. A method to get the stakeholder to cooperate, is to set up one or several promoter(s) to get the word out about the network and advocate the benefits by joining and thereby show common goals and objectives. (Zehrer & Raich, 2010)

According to Morrison, et al. (2004) does new networks have potential value to be in the foundation stage of the network's lifecycle, where every individual is important and collectively gives substance to the network.

The configuration stage involves detailed setup of the established tourism network by looking at the controlling mechanisms, communication interfaces and how the network manages conflicts that should lead to integration and collaboration (Ring et al., 1992, Doz, 1996, Larson, 1992 in Zehrer & Raich, 2010).

The implementation stage is the process of the actual cooperation within the destination that involves the day-to-day tourism activities, which is done by the network's participants. They need to agree on what is most important and start monitoring them through correct parameters. (Zehrer & Raich, 2010) This will be applied in a global context in the case study and not within a local network.

The stabilization stage is where the network has achieved stability and where the participants are aware of the importance of collaboration and know what to expect from the cooperation in the network. This takes the network out of the developmental phases and into the more established phase where the participants have a realistic picture of each other's capabilities, but at the same time conflicts can more easily emerge. For a large network, there is a greater chance of communication gaps in the network, which can cause problems within coordination and balance of interests. (Zehrer & Raich, 2010)

The transformation stage is where the network's results are showing. It is also the stage where adjustments are needed to be implemented in the network to survive in a changing market. (*ibid*)

Zehrer & Raich (2009) explored further the failures of SMEs within tourism and identified the following factors as having a higher risk of business collapse:

1) SMEs who had an emotional attachment to the business,
2) SMEs who tended to abandon the business, when they were struggling,
3) Management who had no experience in the tourism industry nor formal background within business or marketing,
4) Inadequate management and capital,
5) SMEs unable to cope with season and weekend peaks.

These are the some of the problems that businesses are struggling with and a network can help SMEs to handle these crises that many businesses are facing with information and guidance from experienced professionals.

4.3 PART CONCLUSION

There is a clear advantage of having a network within the tourism industry, as shown in the literature review about the use of networks to develop and improve products and services within the tourism industry. Still, it is complex, and is up to the participants to create value and make it a success. There are countless types of networks, which also makes to the structuring of a new network a challenge. The goal for a successful network is to create a balance of knowledge sharing through the members, where most members both contribute to and take advantage of the knowledge, which strengthens all parties' businesses.

Ecotourism has been a growing industry over the last 30 years, when it first was defined. There is more focus on the destruction of nature due to the travel industry and there is an actual market for Eco tourists.

After much research about global tourism networks within ecotourism, it was my perception that there was a theoretical gap in the literature focused on ecotourism. The applied framework is the theory that came closest to a global tourism network. The additional elements from other authors, will contribute to a clearer theoretical approach in terms of the case study.

Morrison, et al. (2004) framework of successful international networks brings an overall idea of what a strong network should consist of. Implementing the tool of Fundamental Interrelated Components, from an organization that works with networks within sustainability, illuminates the importance of the development possibilities for the participants by ensuring their three components (Ortiz & Rivero, 2006).

This chapter takes the reader through the five essential elements that are necessary for the creation of tourism networks and brings it into an ecotourism context. There must be a perceived need for the network to succeed, but it is also important to follow the participant's evolving needs for the network to survive. (Morrison, et al., 2004, Ortiz & Rivero, 2006)

The network's structure and leadership depends on the purpose of the network and the direction that has been chosen for it, while keeping the leadership neutral and should be based on the network's values. In the network's structure, should there be clear strategy on the resources that are available. It is crucial for development that the resource foundation is planned in terms of expenses and work hours. Furthermore, it

is relevant to encourage members' participation for the network to function. These are the core principles of a tourism network to build strong ties among its participants.

This is the reason why this section was expanded with the Commitment-Trust Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), which brings to attention, the importance of awareness of tourism networks' collaboration, trust, commitment, communication and collaboration extent.

As Sandstrøm (2012) describes, it has it never been more easy to communicate than it is now through social media and other communication platforms. There are endless possibilities to structure a network, but it takes certain elements, such as authenticity, trust, proximity, openness and community, for it to be successful and for the relationships among the members to create value for the network.

There are different benefits that come with being a part of a tourism network and in this case amongst ecotourism business owners. The end goal is to build a stronger knowledge foundation and that is done in different ways in terms of type of network and functionality.

By using the analytical tool of the tourism network's lifecycle, we can look at the applicable tourism network, identify their current stage, and reach the next stage in the network's development.

This thorough examination of the setup of a successful tourism network set in a global context will create a stronger development base for the future of GEN.

CHAPTER 5 - CASE PRESENTATION: GLOBAL ECOTOURISM NETWORK

In this chapter, the relevant information regarding the case study about the Global Ecotourism Network (GEN) is presented. GEN is a network that was formed in February 2015 by the previous advisory committee of *'International Tourism Collective'* (ITC) in *'The International Ecotourism Society'* (TIES). The members of the advisory committee had collectively left the organization due to lack of information and clarity about the financial statement of the organization. (App #7, Global Ecotourism Network, 2015).

The previous advisory board of ITC then formed a new organization where they could carry on what they had envisioned for TIES but in *"...a new, positive, transparent and accountable global association to support the growth of authentic ecotourism and sustainable tourism around the world."* (App #7, Global Ecotourism Network, 2015, s. 1).

FIGURE 2: GEN'S EXECUTIVE BOARD STRUCTURE
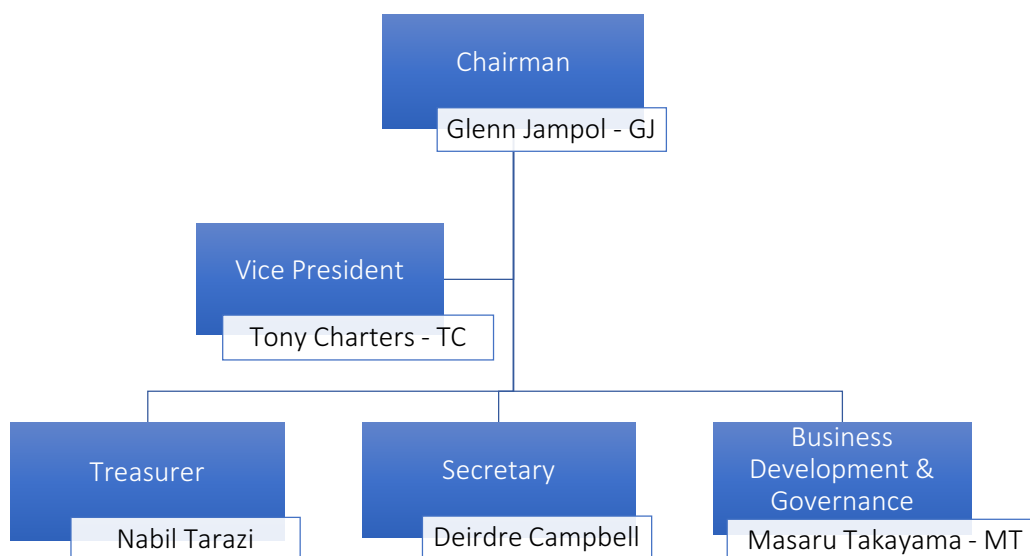
Source: (GEN Website)

GEN currently consists of 10 board members who each have many years of experience within ecotourism. Figure 2 illustrates GEN's organizational structure of the executive board, where Glenn Jampol (Costa Rica) is chairman. Tony Charters (Australia) is the Vice President, Nabil Tarazi (Jordan) is the Treasurer, Deirdre Campbell (Canada) is the Secretary, and Masaru Takayama (Japan) is within Business Development & Governance (GEN Website).

The founding board members share the desire to develop the world's ecotourism and conservation of the environment. That is the foundation of GEN's existence and this is their starting point.

Most organizations, within the field of ecotourism focus merely on sustainable tourism (GEN Website). Sustainable tourism involves addressing issues on the negative impacts that tourism can bring to an environment, which is defined as *"…the forms of tourism which meet the needs of tourists, the tourist industry and host communities today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."* (Swarbrooke, 1999, p. 13 in Farmaki, 2015)

The founders of GEN believed that there was a need for an ecotourism organization. They wanted to create a network organization that could link business, destinations, academia and travelers together. GEN envisions them sharing knowledge and experiences and avoiding the common mistakes with running an ecotourism business. (GEN Website)

> GEN's mission is to bring *"… together the world's national and regional ecotourism associations and networks, destinations, indigenous peoples, global operators, professionals and academicians to grow the industry, provide advocacy and thought leadership, and to encourage innovation and authenticity in ecotourism."* (GEN Website)

GEN is currently building their membership base, starting within their own network. The board has worked within ecotourism for many years and each have an established network where they are promoting GEN. Furthermore, was GEN present at the ITB Conference in Berlin in March 2016, where GJ did a presentation on GEN and what ecotourism brings to a destination. GJ announced ITB as a new alliance in the work towards a better ecotourism industry. GJ is managing the organization and has been the main person in the development of GEN. He has done interviews and presentations like the one in Berlin 2016 around the world to spread awareness about GEN. To create exposure was GJ interviewed twice by Ron Mader, who is a tourism reporter focusing on conscious travel including ecotourism. Ron Mader has his own YouTube channel (Mader, 2016) and an award-winning website (Planeta Website, 2016). These interviews helped in another way contribute to getting GEN introduced to the travel- and ecotourism industry.

At the moment does GEN have a Facebook group and a website. The board's communication is usually conducted over email and Skype. The members of the board are located all over the world, which can be a challenge when trying to get everybody online at the same time due the time differences. Otherwise, they meet at travel conferences around the world. By having these Skype meetings, can misunderstandings and misinterpretations occur because the board is not sitting face to face. It would cost time and money for the board members to meet in person, which is why this has not been prioritized. However, has it been possible for several board members to meet at travel conferences.

According to TC, it will be a challenge to cut through the information overload that exists online (App #2 – TC, 2015). This statement implies that GEN needs to be competent enough in providing relevant information to its members. Much information is available online and GEN would need to be updated with the newest technology and tools. GEN would need to prove to their possible participants and investors that they are stable player that will guide the ecotourism industry.

It is obvious that the board of GEN needs to nurture the relationship with its members, which will take time and effort. The board surely wants to reach all corners of the global ecotourism industry.

Another challenge that GEN is facing is that the board members each have their own agendas. An observation was made that only a few board members contribute to the work and development of GEN, which is not only affecting the development, but is also having an effect on the motivation for the contributing board members. This finding was presented in my internship report, which concluded that in order for the network to survive, it would take strong leadership and an active board. (Pedersen, 2015)

GEN's overall challenge seems to be finding a proper action plan in order to reach their mission and become a valuable network, which can gather the ecotourism industry under one umbrella. The action plan should strive towards developing their membership base as well as the structure of it all, which is concerning terms of members, knowledge sharing as the organizational structure. This is the reason there was found a reason for this research.

Creating an organization based on a group of people that share an interest and a belief from different parts of the world is ambitious. The following chapter 6 – Analysis, will from the problem statement of this thesis trying examine the possibilities for development of GEN allowing it to become a successful network by applying the expanded SITN framework from chapter 4 together with the data collection.

CHAPTER 6 - ANALYSIS

The theoretical framework described in chapter 4, was expanded upon the existing framework of Morrison, et al. (2004) due to the gap that was identified in the current literature. The analysis will apply the new expansion of the SITN framework, and use GEN's case to identify areas within the elements that are in place as well as areas that need to be implemented in order to attract new members and make GEN successful. GEN is facing a great deal of challenges, which was described in the case presentation in Chapter 5, which showed that GEN was missing a clear plan on the development of the network. The applied data is derived from interviews and a survey amongst potential members of GEN, which was described in the methodology Chapter 2. Furthermore, relevant internship experiences and observations will be applied.

6.1 GEN'S OBJECTIVES AND PURPOSES

In the reconstructed framework by Morrison, et. al. (2004) Objectives and Purposes is the first part. The overall objective of having an organization such as GEN, is to develop and expand the international ecotourism industry, which can bring multiple advantages along in terms of environmental conservation and development of communities in developing countries. GEN's purpose is simply to get new members and participants that are involved within tourism, ecotourism, responsible tourism and sustainable tourism. Without the members, there is no network and therefore GEN needs to create value for their members.

VALUE CREATION

According to the interviewed NPO, there are currently no global networks that are creating value for their ecotourism organization and there is a need for a functional and well-constructed network. The NPO is a local network within ecotourism, contributing with knowledge to other networks, but without getting anything back. (App #6 – NPO, 2016) "*It is because everyone is in such a different stage in development and where they are at in their country and policies and then has stuff happening. It is never going to be at one level. I do not think for this sector.*" (App #6 – NPO, 2016, p. 2) At the same time the tourism industry is filled with networks and according to the NPO, there is a greater need for an informal network that is directly focused on certain areas. They waste time on networks where too many do not involve their interests and instead have fewer people who are committed in the network. The existing networks are suffering from too

much bureaucracy with inventing reasons to fund projects just for the sake of networking and not for the cause. (App #6 – NPO, 2016)

This statement from the NPO shows that the existing networks are struggling to create value for their members and there is need for a network that fulfills that need, which would require the right structure and system.

The Chairman of GEN has the role of leading the network in the right direction and as Chairman, GJ explains, he wants to create an objective *'Think Tank'* for good solutions between businesses across the world that are dealing with tourism in a responsible and symbiotic way. The ecotourism industry wants ideas they can apply in their business. He strongly believes that the board members, who have over 200 years of experience within ecotourism combined, are the right people to lead the network. (App #1 - GJ, 2015) AT sees GEN becoming an organization that can formulate common policies for the ecotourism industry by bringing organizations and industrial players together as well as becoming the center of debates and discussions for innovation and helping to solve the challenges the industry is facing. "*I think that it will be necessary because the industry is becoming so complicated. The challenges are becoming so global and you need a global perspective to deal with some of the local issues.*" (App #3 – AT, 2016, p. 1)

GEN was created by former advisory committee members in TIES, which is additionally bringing value to GEN through the gained experience. Through conversations with GJ and TC it was clear that the board is bringing that experience and knowledge into their new network that they gained at TIES. The overall goal is the same, but they want to be a different organization than TIES. The board consists of people from Asia, Australia, Latin America, United States, Europe and the Middle East, which all have a strong network among friends, allies, colleagues, who would have an influence in the creation of GEN as well as adding value. (App #5- GJ, 2016)

GJ envisions developing the ecotourism industry itself, through the strong voice that he believes that the board members of GEN hold. GEN should be a community that brings businesses together who have had similar projects and who can learn from each other. (App #1 - GJ, 2015) The focus on climate change is increasing and there are a large number of businesses that could benefit from the green technologies that are available to them. The access to this type of information needs to be improved in order for the tourism industry to evolve towards a more sustainable industry. (App #5- GJ, 2016)

GEN needs to create value for the future members that can improve their business. As Courvisanos & Jain, (2006) explains, ecotourism is about preservation, promoting tourism, not harming the environment, so these subjects would be the overall communities that need to be included in the construction of knowledge sharing by GEN.

According to Ortiz & Rivero (2006) there must be a clear value in order to create trust from their members. GEN sees that the value they create is providing the members with new knowledge that can grow their business. *"They are looking for ways in which they can grow their business, and attract more people who would be interested in the product that they are trying to sell."* (App #1 - GJ, 2015, p. 1-2)

GJ's plan to create value is *"… to have a centralized storage base of ideas, of people, of places where they feel that they getting a lot of information that is going to help them develop."* (App #1 - GJ, 2015, p. 2)

Morrison, et. al. (2004) explains that the active engagement of people with similar values is looked at as a success factor, which in this case means that the desired result would be to have engaged members who contribute to the knowledge that can help others or ask for help and get valuable advice. In order to reach all the different types of businesses that the ecotourism industry includes, GEN needs to be highly structured in their way of handling the information to ensure their members benefit.

MT explains that one of GEN's challenges is dealing with information technology advancements because in the end it comes down to people (App #4 – MT, 2016). At the moment GEN has a Facebook group with 1219 members (GEN's Facebook group, 2016) and a website (GEN Website) with no information on how to connect with other members within the same field, such as Eco lodges, trekking routes, nature parks, etc. GEN needs to create value by giving the members the opportunity to connect in the global network. There is no current structure of members nor the communication across the network. A solution to the communication challenges that GEN is experiencing could be solved with a communication system on their website where the members can sign up and specify what their interests are. They can post stories or ask questions to the similar businesses. This can create a sense of belonging for ecotourism businesses struggling to develop their business.

The NPO does not view knowledge sharing as benefitting possible competitors and creating a possible disadvantage, but instead views it more as a responsibility to share information that can help everybody contribute to a healthier planet. The private business shared the same belief. (APP #6 – NPO, 2016, MP3 #2 – PB, 2016)

The communication platform should have a way for members to get in contact with one another about projects and dilemmas, which can create an important value for members. The NPO mentions the positive outcome of having these relationships across the network and thereby giving them the option to communicate with peers (App #6 – NPO, 2016).

As Ortiz & Rivero (2006) mentions, a way of creating value could also be through donor projects. This can be applied in this case where specialists would give their time and expertise to help ecotourism businesses in

need and thereafter, post this as a GEN donor project. This form of marketing project can create awareness around the cause and value for GEN's brand as Ortiz & Rivero (2006) advocates in their network development recommendation.

Another way of creating value can be through members' stories (Ortiz & Rivero, 2006). The testimonial can be about how the members found help through GEN and with the new knowledge developed their business. This could be a video or a blog for GEN's website that shows potential members a valuable reason to be a part of GEN.

There is potential for GEN's value creation, but as MT mentions, GEN lacks credibility among the ecotourism industry. At the moment GEN only have a few partners, which potential members may be skeptical of. It takes navigation of a strong strategy to deliver good results and achieve credibility. (App #4 – MT, 2016)

The NGO mentions that they do most of their networking through social media to get information and promotion and do not see the need for an ecotourism network. (MP3 #1 – NGO, 2016) This was surprising due to the role of the NGO and the position they have a national NGO who were representing many areas of the country. This demonstrates that it will not be everyone that would like to join or even sees the value in joining a global ecotourism network.

PARTNERSHIPS

At the ITB Berlin conference in March 2016, GEN made an alliance with ITB Berlin to contribute the good cause of improving the ecotourism industry around the world. The alliance was announced at the ITB Berlin conference during the GJ's presentation of GEN and his work within ecotourism.

GJ describes the importance of the relationship *"They are an organizational member in the sense of they believe that GEN is an organization that can really do something and they want to show their sense of solidarity and believe in sustainable tourism."* (App #5 - GJ, 2016, p. 4)

Having this partnership was a good move in terms of building up a brand and reputation. ITB Berlin calls themselves: *"The World's Leading Travel Trade Show"* (ITB Berlin Website, 2016), which takes place every year in Berlin. This was a good scene for GEN to be presented and make some important connections. GJ expressed to me that this new relationship with ITB is significant in creating credibility for GEN to the travel industry.

GEN has created partnerships with organizations, such as the Asian Ecotourism Network (AEN), where MT is the Chairman of, as well as being a board member of GEN. Furthermore, GEN partnered up with the National Association of Ecotourism from Costa Rica. GJ does not yet know how these relationships will be

constructed. (App #5, - GJ, 2016) This needs to be structured to ensure that the partner organizations, knows what is expected of them and what they can get out of collaborating with GEN.

6.2 THE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE AND LEADERSHIP OF GEN

As showed in Chapter 5, GEN currently consist of an executive board and regular board members. The communication is primarily done over Skype due to the long distance between the board members. It became clear that the Chairman did most of the exposure work of GEN, which was explored further in the internship report, where a lack of commitment in the board was discovered that was affecting the development (Pedersen, 2015)

MT sees the communication among the board as a challenge due to distance and time difference between the board members. It is necessary for the board to meet face to face in order to develop the network, which it takes money and time. (App #4 – MT, 2016) A Skype conversation can be difficult to do with 10 people, without ideas getting lost in discussions.

According to GJ the board has been very active; "*We have attended many conferences representing and speaking about GEN, and just recently we were asked by the tourism board of Chile and an organization called "regenerate a" to come and consult and participate in a symposium and workshops regarding the development and communication for island tourism, particularly in the archipelago of Chile as well as the other islands in that country.* (App #10 – GJ, 2016, p. 1) Being at tourism conferences enables them to reach regional representatives from all over the world and promote GEN.

According to Morrison, et. al, (2004) networks are complex in nature due to the many possible structural combinations. It is important that the network is transparent and clear in order to create membership trust. Additionally, it is essential that the network remains impartial towards their members and does not compete with their businesses, which TC is very clear about (App #2 – TC, 2015). In TIES, the members were competing with other consultants, but in GEN, he sees it as "… *a role for a group that takes a complementary role to national and regional groups, rather than a competitor role. So, information can be disbursed across the whole world and we can learn from each other and sort of get some collective activities happening, so my vision for GEN is to really take on that overarching umbrella role and to be equipped to do that.*" (App #2 – TC, 2015, p. 1)

Since research of the literature did not provide a base for the optimal construction on how a global tourism network should be structured, this thesis will follow the guidelines of a transparent structure that Morrison, et al., (2004) describes. GJ says in the first interview that there is no real guideline for the structure of an

ecotourism organization, but one thing they are certain of is that they want transparency in the organization due to the previous negative experience in TIES (App #1 - GJ, 2015). According to GJ, people can be jaded when they hear about another non-profit organization, which is yet another reason why GEN should be as transparent as possible (App #5 - GJ, 2016). This would benefit members as well as future investors and will help GEN become THE ecotourism organization. Other than being transparent, the network needs to be well structured, so it will be easy for members to find relevant information regarding their interests (App #6 – NPO, 2016).

GJ mentions that the biggest challenge for GEN is to inform the world of ecotourism and sustainable tourism through GEN's experience and knowledge within this field. GJ and TC want GEN to be the binding agent in the development of responsible tourism and become an umbrella organization. Furthermore, it is the goal that GEN objectively invests in innovation projects for their members. (App #1 - GJ, 2015, App #2 – TC, 2015)

6.3 GEN'S RESOURCING

As Ortiz & Rivero (2006) and Morrison, et. al. (2004) explain, it is important to have the resourcing and financial strategy in order. All board members should have relevant expertise and knowledge mapped out as well as describing the development opportunities. According to GJ and TC, GEN's future financial structure is based on free memberships, investments and voluntary resources, which fits the fifth type of a network's financial funding that can be found in Chapter 4, Table 6 (page 32) in the theoretical framework under Resourcing (Morrison, et al., 2004). The fifth type covers *membership, sponsorship* and *voluntary in kind.* The financial funding, in terms of finances and human resources, can create opportunities for GEN to reach their future members and for the network to develop.

The current human resources consist of the board, is described as a diverse group of people having common goals in terms of building a wise and strong ecotourism industry. (App #3 – AT, 2016)

According to the NPO's experience, financial investments in the ecotourism industry does not always work out, but moreover people's invested time, matter in terms of contribution for the ecotourism industry (App #6 – NPO, 2016). GEN needs to be aware of experiences, like the NPO's, to function as a transparent network that works to improve the ecotourism industry.

GEN's expenses have so far been minimal, because the board has done most of the work, and their travel expenses have been primarily covered by organizations, who asked for GEN's help. "*As it stands now, the only donations we have received have been from board members and others not in money, but rather in time and labor helping us build our website and other aspects of social media.*" (App #10 – GJ, 2016, p. 2) At the latest board meeting, held in Chile, November 2016, the focus was on which allies, entities or organizations of ecotourism and sustainable tourism as possible investors. (App #10 – GJ, 2016)

TC sees as one of the main challenges that there is a lack of resources. Capital for an Executive Director and the possibility that the board could meet once or twice a year, would enable GEN to become more evolved. The board consists of small operators who do not have the capacity to sponsor this. (App # 2 – TC, 2015) This request is now implemented in the development plans, which GJ mentions in the email correspondence that "*…in the near future we will be trying to raise funds so that we may effectively hire an executive director who could guide us through all of the necessary work and developments in order to increase our presence throughout the world.*" (App #10 – GJ, 2016, p. 1-2) This Executive Director would help in working towards getting the ideas brought to life. Ideas from GEN and experienced members could contribute to the tourism community. (App #10 – GJ, 2016)

DONATIONS

According to GJ, GEN has accomplished a great deal in only a year and a half. GEN has officially been accepted as a nonprofit organization in the United States with 501(c)(3) status. This allows GEN to receive donations from individuals and organizations, while offering a tax deduction. Exactly who would donate to GEN, is yet unknown but this item is on the agenda (App #10 – GJ, 2016). The money that GEN will receive will go to an Executive Director, conferences, traveling expenses, publishing papers and projects. Their aim is to be totally independent, but he shares his concern as to whether the investment will be enough to create and develop new projects. (App #1 - GJ, 2015)

Referring to my previous observation to the lack of structure within the network's members, in *GEN's Objectives and Purposes* on page. 48, would an investment towards communication platform create benefit for the members.

TC further explains that they are in the position of deciding where GEN's headquarters should be located. The cost here is a motivator to locate the headquarter in a country where the cost is low in terms of office

rent and the salary of an employee that should take on the role of an executive officer. Costa Rica is considered, which is convenient because the Chairman would be nearby. (App #2 - TC, 2015)

MEMBERSHIP FEE OR NOT?

According to Morrison, et. al (2004) it creates a stronger commitment from the members to the network's purpose if there is a membership fee, but this is not the direction that GEN is going.

GJ expressed that the board has agreed that GEN will be a network who is funded and not with membership fees. *"We would have memberships based on interest and the funding would allow us to objectively go about and innovate projects that would be interesting, helpful and pragmatic applicable for all of our members and that is what creating an organization that is truly reflective, what the ecotourism world needs and wants in order to grow."* (App #1 - GJ, 2015, p. 3-4) This was yet again confirmed in the email correspondence with GJ, where he mentions that there are many organizations who would like to become allies of GEN, but this commitment will not entail a paid membership at this time. The money will come from funds on a larger scale through donations from interested organizations and businesses within ecotourism, sustainable tourism or responsible businesses. (App #10 – GJ, 2016)

TC is likewise against the membership fee as well as a way to stay neutral. *"GEN should be complementary and working with the organizations and we are happy to share our information and so on, but the relationship should be cooperative, collaborative relationship and not a competitive one."* (App #2 - TC, 2015, p. 2)

TC further explains that the membership form is ambitious, due to the obligation that GEN would have to its members. (App #2 – TC, 2015) *"Memberships are a really big challenge for groups around the world. You can be a member of a thousand things on Facebook and it all costs nothing."* (App #2 – TC. 2015, p. 7) GEN would need to come up with benefits that covers all members' needs in return for the membership fee.

However, according to GJ paid memberships in the future can become a reality in terms of corporate affiliation, resulting in benefits for the participants. For now, they are concentrating on promoting GEN as a think tank and global consultation organization, whose purpose is to educate, train, and spread ecotourism news about good tourism practices and ecotourism. (App #10 – GJ, 2016)

The data collection section of the survey is not significant enough to generalize the results of the whole ecotourism industry, but it shows a pattern within the ecotourism industry, which will give an insight to the understanding of their current relationship to networks. To explore the willingness of GENs potential

members to pay a membership fee and how large this fee would be annually, the following questions in Figure 3 and Table 9 below were asked in the survey;

FIGURE 3: MEMBERSHIP FEES
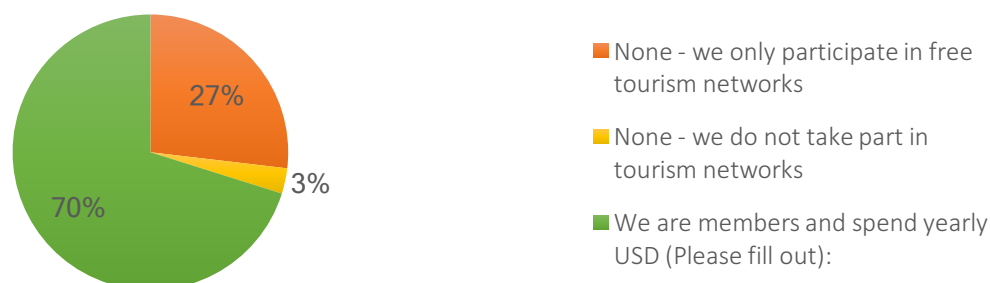
The results from the survey participants in Figure 3, 70% spend money on memberships each year. 27% only participate in free network and 3% do not take part in networks at all. This indicates that 47 of the 70 respondents are willing paying to be a part of a tourism network, which GEN can consider in the future. However, there is still a large group who cannot afford or do not want to spend money on networks. The 47 that filled out the amount that is paid annually is illustrated in Table 9 below. (App #9 – survey, 2016)

TABLE 9: MONEY SPENT ON MEMBERSHIPS ANNUALLY

Amount paid annually:	$30-500	$500-1500	$2000-3000	$3000-10000
Number of answers:	19	9	4	7

The 47 respondents, who were spending money on networks, filled out questions in their own words and numbers, which gave a diverse result. Some respondent wrote an estimate, while others wrote an interval. 8 of the respondents wrote an answer that was not usable, which left answers from 39 respondents that were applicable to explore. Due to the respondents' different amounts and intervals, the division in Table 9, has been made into four intervals corresponding to the written amounts. Therefore, the amount in piles are of different intervals (App #9 – survey, 2016)

19 companies pay between $30-500 annually on networks, however, the responses do not indicate the number of networks that this entails.

By looking at these intervals in Table 9, is it possible to see that none of the respondents are paying between $1500-2000. Otherwise the intervals are covering from $30-1500 and from $2000-10000.

The highest amount is $10000, which is quite a lot of money for being part of a network. There is a limited consistency between the type of organization or the number of employees that indicates how much they pay for network memberships. However, the ones that are spending the highest amount are all private businesses that have between 51-250 employees. (App #9 – survey, 2016)

6.4 MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

This element is truly important for the network's success. The members are essential to bringing knowledge and dilemmas that they are facing, and encourage innovation (Baggio & Cooper, 2010).

In order to create strong ties there has to be trust and shared values among the members. They must be willing to share information that can benefit others and create a solidarity among the network (Zehrer & Raich, 2010)

In Morgan & Hunt's (1994) Commitment-Trust Theory, the goal is to build commitment and trust to strengthen the network through these five elements; tourism network collaboration, trust, commitment, communication and collaboration extent. All the elements can affect one another. It is up to GEN to create this atmosphere and steer the communication to show the common goal across the ecotourism industry in a clear and honest approach in order to create the necessary trust.

Elements from Sandstrøm (2012) are similar in the development of functioning and value-adding relationships with his five elements; authenticity, trust, proximity, openness and community.

GEN should divide the participants into primary and secondary participants, where region will be the primary parameter. However, this division can be developed in phases over time. (Baggio & Cooper, 2010)

GJ's idea of a network that functions as a think tank would mainly focus on consultation and working with regional groups that want to develop their area to be more sustainable and thereby become an umbrella organization. These regional ecotourism organizations would be GEN's primary members. Small operators and businesses within ecotourism would then be the secondary members.

Interviews with the survey participants were done to get a deeper understanding of the need for networks. From the NPO's perspective there was a need for a global network, where they could exchange information across destinations. This is typical for small businesses who do not have the time to analyze information or news and by exchanging among peers can save time and resources. The NPO sees the players in ecotourism

as entrepreneurs who are committed to the environment, but they have quite different amounts of resources available to them. The NPO speaks highly of the entrepreneurs within ecotourism. *"They genuinely are the leaders of the future and have posts for high standards and commitment. "(*App #6 – NPO, 2016, p. 3) The NPO sees great potential in the ecotourism businesses and sees them as the leaders of good tourism practice, and the rest of the tourism industry should look up to them.

The NPO is a local ecotourism network and has experience with building up a network in their own country. The need for network exists and people are prepared to learn new skills and this is done through good relationships, which Sandstrøm (2012) refers to in his elements about relationship creation. When the NPO turn to their networks for support, is the communication process done in an informal way and is not structured (App #6 – NPO, 2016). There are no written articles or blog, thus no information is shared to others, then the ones involved.

The NPO believes in smaller networks focused on specific areas to avoid wasting time. The NPO states that everyone uses networks in different ways and especially new businesses do not have the time to involve themselves in a network. (App #6 – NPO, 2016)

According to the interviewed private businesses, there is a need of a network to share examples of good practice for others to learn. Most of ecotourism businesses are small and do not have the capacity to travel and experience new ways of doing business. Networks can be used to show how developing countries can improve local communities by introducing them to ecotourism. Tourism can in many areas be seen as a destructive business to cultures and the environment, but here it is important to give the local communities the needed information about ecotourism. Global networking is important in terms of getting the good examples of tourism across, which can lead to change in the way people think of tourism. (MP3 file #2 – PB, 2016)

The participants in the survey were asked what formal networks they were members of and due to the variety of locations of the businesses and organizations they were very different from one another. However, there was a pattern within the type of organization and the types of networks, they were members of. The NPO's and NGO's tended to be members of larger networks, such as Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), European Alliance for Responsible Tourism and Hospitality (EARTH), The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) and UNESCO. While the local private businesses were members of smaller local and national networks. (App #9 – survey, 2016)

6.5 BENEFITS AND INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

Members' benefit from being involved with GEN, within these broad subjects: learning and exchange, business activity and community, which can be seen in Table 8 in Chapter 4 on page 38. (Morrison, et al., 2004)

According to Morrison, et al. (2004), the functions and benefits lead towards knowledge exchange between peers and build partnerships. By bringing academic -, private -, and public/private type of networks, connections can be made across the industry and bring researchers and businesses together. The connections can lead to development of the entire industry, if done correctly, through communication, knowledge transfer, and creation of new partnerships.

It is GEN's vision to gather all corners of the ecotourism industry, which means academics, private and public institutions that are involved with ecotourism (GEN Website). This requires that a considerable amount of information needs to be in place and looked through. However, if this can be structured well enough, it can provide great value to the members.

MT has realized that this might be too comprehensive and suggests instead focusing on Eco lodges.

> *Our criteria were to globally represent and also to help the industry, accommodations, universities, tour operators, and destinations to be comprehensive covered and to truly represent ecotourism. But now with GEN, I see more opportunities especially now with the Eco lodges we can go even further, not just Eco lodges but green building materials and anything that is related to tourism including transportation, carbon footprint and also local societies.* (App #4 – MT, 2016, p. 1)

The NPO sees a strong need for a network that is focused on the private sector and sees a need to become more ambitious towards sharing useful knowledge. (App #6 – NPO, 2016)

From the private business' view, there is a need for a network that provides marketing and promotion tools that can help get the word out about these small ecotourism destinations, which can be buried amongst the bigger resorts in developing countries. These small businesses do not have the finances to travel and experience other ecotourism locations and cannot afford expensive advertising media. There is a need for a network that can connect businesses worldwide and exchange relevant information. Furthermore, can networks contribute in creating- or replicating ecotourism policies in local governments. (MP3 #2 – PB, 2016)

The provided information cannot be valuable for everyone. "*It is all about learning experiences, information and some things might work in one country and not in others but if you have more information shared you have the liberty to choose, which on that may work better.* (App #4 – MT, 2016, p. 3)

To understand potential new members of GEN, it is important to understand how they apply the network in their work and within what areas they are participating. This is to explore their worldview and the areas that are important to them. Therefore, the participants in the survey were asked about their current relationship with networks.

Chart 1 shows the types of networks that the survey participants are already a part of and how they use them. The respondents could give multiple answers and the pattern shows that tourism trends are the highest form of information that is received amongst networks. Second and third highest was management and marketing tools and information about development projects within local communities. At the bottom were networks that provide information about new technology. (App #9 – survey, 2016)

The respondents were given the opportunity to provide additional information, which 16 chose to do. The responses included specific organizations that they were members of, mainly regional networks (App #9 – survey, 2016).

The survey responses from question 4, which can be viewed in Chart 1, show information areas where the respondents already get their information from networks (App #9 – survey). This can mean either that there is a need for this information or that the need is already being fulfilled by these existing networks.

CHART 1: TYPES OF NETWORKS THE SURVEY RESPONDENT PARTICIPATE IN
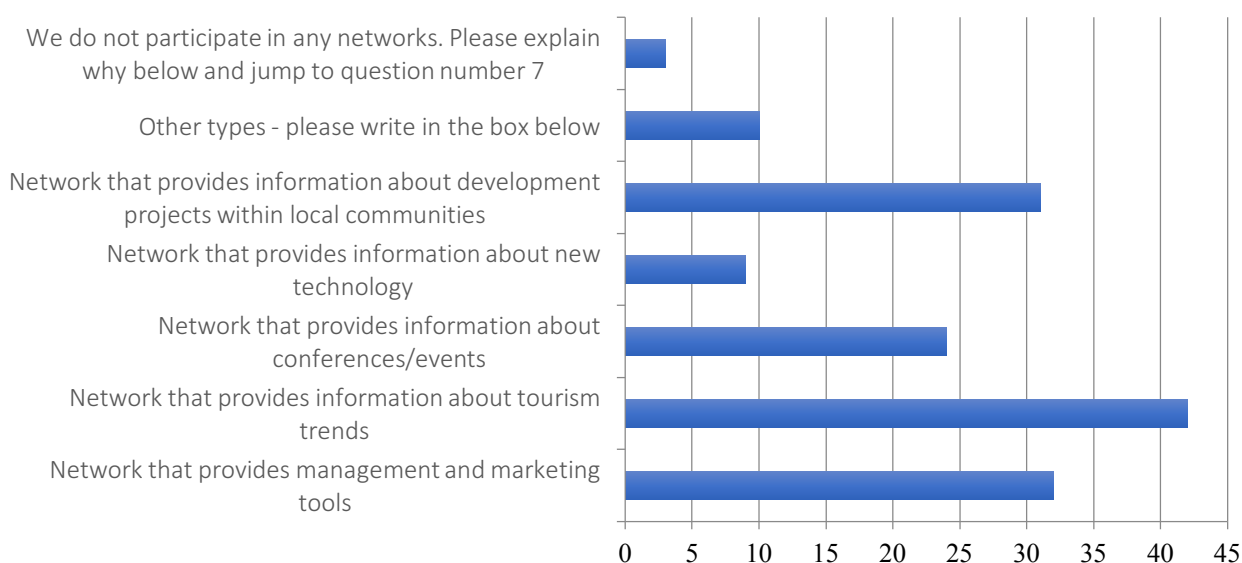
In question #6 (App #8 – survey questions) participants were asked to describe their use of networks and there was a common answer, which was similar to this answer: "*We share opportunities, we ask for experts in relevant fields, we look for project partners among the other members of the networks, etc.*" (App #9 –

survey, 2016, p. 1) However, it depends on what type of organization, how they are using networks. One of the NGO's applies networks for promotion and implementation of their ecotourism programs, while one of the public institutions takes part in networks mainly for the exchange of experience and to join projects. One of the NPO organizations informs: *"We receive news from other organizations similar to us; we can share information, best practices and cooperation opportunities; we are in the public website showing the most relevant itineraries and trips we offer; we are engaged in discussing and campaigns about the main issues of responsible/sustainable tourism."* (App #9 – survey, 2016, p. 3) A private business writes about the common purpose between peers. *"We want to help each other to strengthen our business and build positive impact to ecotourism destinations. As a small business, we can't do something big but together we can."* (App #9 – survey, 2016, p. 6)

This could imply that not all information is applicable to everyone and it calls for a well-structured base in order to create the best benefits for all members. This could indicate some form of filtering information based on type of organization, which leads to the specific type of information that is relevant for the respondents.

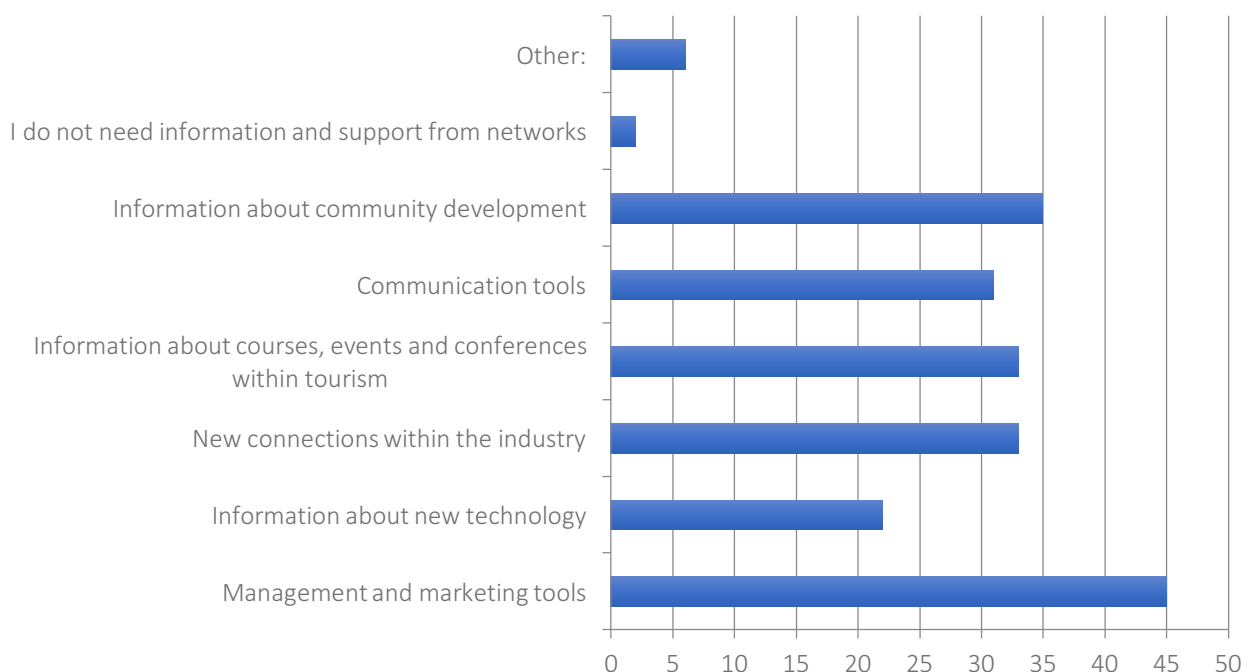CHART 2: CATEGORIES OF RELEVANT INFORMATION FOR THE SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

Chart 2 shows that the majority of the respondents, with 45 out the 70 respondents, seeks information about management and marketing tools. Thereafter, is it almost a tie between information about community development, communication tools, information about courses, events and conferences within

tourism, and creating new connections within the industry. Only two answered that they did not need any information and support from networks. Surprisingly, only 22 out of 70 were interested in getting information about new technology. During the research at GEN, there was a lot of talk about new technology that could improve the ecotourism industry, such as new pool systems and solar power. Nonetheless, this part of the survey shows that there is a desire to gain knowledge about running an ecotourism business, and not about new technology. This indicates that the need for information about new technology is not as important to this group of respondents as first expected. (App #9 – survey, 2016)

6.6 GEN'S LIFECYCLE

Tourism network lifecycles has been added to the SITN framework. This analytical tool will be applied to identify GEN's current stage and what they need to implement in their development plans to reach the subsequent stages. This tool is normally used for local networks (Zehrer & Raich, 2010), but in this case study it will be applied in a global context.

FOUNDATION STAGE

In GEN's foundation stage the network has attracted attention from the ecotourism industry and made a few partnerships, which were described in 'GEN's Objectives and Purposes' section. These relationships are important and contribute to GEN's credibility, creating value for GEN. The partnerships can be utilized in attracting new members to GEN in their marketing strategy which can be done through social media including GEN's and their partners' websites.

GEN has their mission and values in place but are struggling to manage the memberships. At the moment GEN's membership base consists of 1237 people on their Facebook Group (GEN's Facebook group, 2016), where there are numerous postings every day. Only postings with absolutely no relevance to ecotourism are removed, and a great number of members use it as an opportunity to promote their business. This makes it difficult to see the benefits for possible future members. The chairman has recently asked for information in the following message to members of the Facebook Group:

"New Friends. If you are interested in joining the Global Ecotourism Network, we must have some sort of knowledge about you and your work and interests or a current member who will recommend you. Please DO NOT send Facebook profiles that do not include information that would tell us about your commitment to ecotourism and sustainable tourism, as this will be an impediment to being accepted into the group until we open it to the public. Thank you for your understanding." (GEN's Facebook group, 2016)

This request shows that GEN is headed in the right direction of finding a system that ensures the members' commitment to the cause by getting their information about their relation to ecotourism. According to GJ, there is already a large number of organizations that are interested in becoming affiliated with GEN. (App #10 – GJ, 2016)

To reach the configuration stage, a knowledge sharing system is needed.

CONFIGURATION STAGE

The configurations stage calls for a detailed setup with control of the communication interfaces, which should be closely managed to ensure successful collaboration in the network (Zehrer & Raich, 2010).

GEN does not fulfill the criteria for the configuration stage, but it informs its members of what is necessary in order to get to this stage. This does not happen overnight and once GEN has their profile list of their members, it will be easier to categorize them by business type, and set up of the communication platform.

IMPLEMENTATION STAGE

Once GEN has established a functional system for their members, the next stage is the implementation stage, which appears when there is an existing cooperation across the network (Zehrer & Raich, 2010). GEN would need to agree on how this can be developed in the most functional manner, which not only benefits the involved in the cooperation, but also can create knowledge for the rest of the network. Additionally, it is important that the participants agree on the importance of the network and have a mutual understanding of the cooperation that is necessary. In this case study cooperation is involved in everything that GEN has to offer their members, including sharing of relevant knowledge.

STABILIZATION STAGE

The stabilization stage occurs when GEN has achieved stability in terms of having the participants' commitment and understanding of the importance of the collaboration among them. In this stage, all actors involved in the network are aware of the setup of GEN and what to expect from it. Furthermore, it will show all of GEN member's capabilities, and by this create a more effective and functional network.

TRANSFORMATION STAGE

The transformation stage appears when GEN shows results from the development from the information exchanged among the members, strengthening the ecotourism industry. However, it is important to have the ability to make adjustments and transform the network to fit the members' needs. Hopefully, the results will also have saved some businesses within ecotourism from failing, and save time and money because of the advice and guidance from peers.

6.7 PART CONCLUSION

The expanded SITN framework creates a full overview of what GEN needs to develop in order to become an attractive and successful tourism network for new members. The framework's purpose was to highlight areas where GEN is lacking and areas they have accomplished.

The analysis of GEN's objectives and purposes showed that the founders of GEN have given a lot of thought to what GEN is about. They have ambitions that GEN can become the leading umbrella organization of the ecotourism industry, as well as a think tank for all corners of ecotourism. The board and the existing members of GEN bring a great deal of knowledge, which is the most important value that GEN brings to their potential members. They not only have credibility from their established connections within ecotourism, but they have proof that they can provide value to their potential members.

In terms of value creating, GEN needs to structure their information exchange, which can be done through a professional communication platform. Furthermore, a membership system will also create value for its members, by categorizing each member's expertise and work area.

The organizational structure and leadership of GEN consists of a voluntary board, whose goal is to be transparent, which the literature also supports.

GEN's resources are currently based on human resources, including the work done by the board members, but as GJ mentions, there have been minimal expenses in the creation of GEN. In order to move forward,

GEN needs to receive capital in order to reach their mission to become an umbrella organization for the ecotourism industry, which according to GJ and TC will come from investors.

The literature argues that membership fees create a more committed membership base and the survey participants' patterns showed that there is a willingness to pay a fee to be part of a network. However, it has been decided, by GEN's board, not to have a membership fee at this stage.

It is crucial that GEN understands their members in order for them to create trust and commitment. In the interviews with the survey participants, it was clear that there was a need for a network such as GEN. However, the NPO was a bit more skeptical due to previous experiences with networks. Therefore, it is critical that GEN shows clear benefits to potential members. The survey results showed a pattern that GEN's methods comply generally with how the survey participants are using network; by sharing experiences, learning, receiving news and strengthening their businesses.

The tourism network lifecycle showed that GEN currently is in the foundation stage, and once they have found a system to organize their members' profiles and business types, they can move to the configuration stage. The following stages demand that the information flow is functioning and the members know what to expect and how to use the network, and at the end, clear results of the network can be seen.

The expanded SITN framework has given an overall examination on how GEN could develop, but the literature does not indicate how the organization should be structured or a communication system should be created, which is an important part of the development of GEN in becoming a successful tourism network in 2017. This will be discussed further in the discussion in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 7 - DISCUSSION

This chapter will discuss the different aspects there is to this case study in terms of the applied literature as well as the results gained in the analysis from the performed interviews and survey result. The expanded SITN framework will form the structure of the discussion and the chapter will finish with an overall discussion of challenges and opportunities of the framework.

GEN'S OBJECTIVES AND PURPOSES

GEN's objectives and purposes have been defined, but the specific value creation is not yet defined. As the literature review enlightens, networks bring value in terms of knowledge, which can be applied as a tool to overcome common challenges (Zehrer & Raich, 2010). GEN is still in the foundation stage and not structured to deliver the value creating tools yet.

As explained in the theoretical framework, local- and global networks have different challenges because local networks work within the same environment (Hoarau, et al., 2012). However, a global network within ecotourism share similar features with a local network. The actors in an ecotourism network share the same values, in terms of preserving the environment while having a profitable business. Having similar values creates a foundation for achieving closer relations among the members.

According to the NPO there are no current global ecotourism networks that are creating value for them and moreover the NPO sees a great need for one that enables knowledge-sharing. (APP #6 – NPO, 2016). This creates a unique opportunity for GEN to become the network that the ecotourism industry has been missing.

GEN'S ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND LEADERSHIP

GEN is still in the early phase with little functional structure in their organization and with loosely defined leadership. This needs to be structured in order to achieve the networks purpose.

The board of GEN is setup as a standard board with a chairman, vice president, treasurer, secretary, and business development and governance (McNamara, 2008), but is not yet fully executed. The literature research within networks did not have any suggestions to the organization's structure. However, the organizational structure and leadership depend of the type of network and the involved actors (Morrison, et

al., 2004). This could be by changing the organizational structure by evolving with an additional workforce or a shift in the functions.

The lack of knowledge within the element of global ecotourism network organizational structure, calls for additional research, which will be discussed in *Further Research*.

GEN'S RESOURCING

The board of GEN has decided to be funded through donations during their foundation stage and not to have any membership fees. Future donations would demand visible results in terms of projects or developments that benefits the ecotourism industry. It is important for GEN to be transparent, according to Ortiz & Rivero (2006), in their financials to bring forth to their members and investors.

There are pros and cons of implementing membership fees. The literature, and the pattern of the survey results, shows that membership fees can be implemented. The survey showed that 47 of out the 70 respondents paid membership fees to networks already. 19 paid between $30-500 annually. Here is it important to acknowledge that the number of memberships is unknown as it could cover the fee for one or more memberships.

According to Morrison, et. al. (2004) membership fees create a stronger commitment from the members to the network's purpose. At the same time, this would also put a heavier demand for results from members' perspective.

If GEN wants to implement a membership fee later in their development process, further research would be advised to assess their competitors' functions and prices. As the interviewed private business mentions, there are many small businesses that would not be able to pay a high fee. (MP3 #2 – PB, 2016)

MEMBERSHIP ENGAGEMENT

To get members to participate and engage in GEN, there must be an understanding of GEN's members' motivations for joining the network (Morrison, et al., 2004). The engagement involves creating the best environment for cooperation within the network. This was explored in the theoretical framework in Chapter 4 by applying Morgan & Hunt's (1994) Commitment-Trust Theory and Sandstrøm's (2012) approach to bringing value to the relationships in the network. However, these relationship elements will never happen fully within the network, but there could be elements within the Commitment-Trust Theory that GEN could strive for and use as guidelines. The NPO experiences that networks within ecotourism had not brought any

benefits to their organization, which gave an impression that there was lack of the elements from the Commitment-Trust Theory; tourism network collaboration, trust, commitment, communication and collaboration extent within the networks that the NPO was a member of. (App #6 – NPO, 2016)

40% of the world's population has access to the Internet today (Internet Live Stats Website, 2016) and this number is increasing each year. This creates great opportunities for small ecotourism operators and businesses from all corners of the world to connect and share experiences (App #6 – NPO, 2016). Yet, there is no academic literature about how to create a network in terms of technical systems to create the best possible communication system.

The existing ecotourism businesses around the world are in different stages in development, which according to the NPO, indicates that the collaboration within a network can be a challenge and will often be utilized on the different levels (App # 6 – NPO, 2016). These different stage levels do not necessarily mean that members cannot collaborate across the network, but moreover the members could be organized based on their development stage and based on what knowledge they could provide to other members.

Due to the intended size of GEN, it can be difficult to create strong ties among members. However, according to Zehrer & Raich (2010) strong ties only occurs when the network is homogenous. This fits the ecotourism industry due to its horizontal cooperation.

BENEFITS AND INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

By having members collaborate within the network, benefits and inter-organizational learning can arise. This demands the network to have an embedded communication systems and community culture in place (Morrison, et al., 2004).

As the interviewed private business mentioned, a network can provide tools such as marketing- and promotion tools for small ecotourism businesses that normally do not have the finances for expensive advertising media.

The survey showed an interesting pattern that is relevant for understanding potential members' needs and areas that would be relevant for them. Around half of the participants had picked five types of information, which shows that there is a need for information within management and marketing tools, community development, communication tools, courses, events and conferences, and networking within the industry.

GEN'S LIFECYCLE

The sixth element of the expanded SITN framework, the Tourism Network's Lifecycle, examines the development stages that tourism networks go through (Zehrer & Raich, 2010). GEN's current stage is the foundation stages and in order to reach the next configuration stage, a knowledge sharing system would need to be implemented. The final stage of the Tourism Network Lifecycle is the transformation stage where the society and members' needs are evaluated. Ortiz & Rivero (2006) encourages networks to be aware of their members' needs. This leads to loyal members and encourages them to be active in the network. This awareness of member needs calls for transformation throughout all the stages of a network's lifecycle

GEN should change and adapt to the ecotourism society under the ever-changing needs. In this innovative time, GEN will need to transform and follow the development of the ecotourism industry throughout their development stages. This can be in regards to information subjects, communication ways, or change in their organizational structure.

OVERALL DISCUSSION OF THE THEORECTICAL FRAMEWORK

The expanded SITN framework, with focus on ecotourism, brings together relevant aspects of what GEN should develop to become successful.

The humanist inquiry approach (Hirschman, 1986) created the possibility to bring knowledge and experience to this exploratory research. An outside researcher would not have had the same opportunities to explore the case study and understand the organization to the same extent that I had through my internship.

The literature search that was conducted for this case study showed a gap in the academic research for global tourism networks within ecotourism. The original framework by Morrison, et al. (2004) was the only one touching upon the global aspect and each five elements were expanded with related theories and a sixth element on Tourism Network's Lifecycle was included. However, the expanded framework does lack in certain areas such as the organizational structure, communication systems, and development of member relationship.

CHAPTER 8 - CONCLUSION

By applying the expanded SITN framework's six elements to the GEN case study in Chapter 6 – Analysis, it was possible to discover the structured elements that GEN has achieved, and the areas that need to be further developed. The SITN framework's elements are all connected to one another in terms of creating a successful ecotourism network.

GEN's mission is to gather the ecotourism industry under an umbrella and create value by connecting the ecotourism industry. As the literature review in Chapter 3, and theoretical framework Chapter 4 explored, networks have the purpose of connecting people and improve businesses. The literature acknowledges the complexity due to the countless ways of constructing a network, but incentivizing sharing of knowledge and providing easy access to information were found to be common success factors.

Throughout this research and data collection a need for a network such as GEN was confirmed. The NPO confirmed that there is a need for a global ecotourism network to share experiences across the industry and no network is currently fulfilling this need. The survey participants expressed a desire to strengthen the ecotourism industry and believed that this will be possible if they collaborate. Furthermore, a broad range of knowledge sharing was also identified as a need with the survey participants.

In order to fulfill that need, GEN would need to create trust through transparency and being neutral, and encourage commitment and collaboration from their members without competing with members' businesses. However, GEN needs to establish a communication platform in order to enable the members' ability to collaborate and communicate. GEN must through all development stages make changes and adjust to the needs of their members.

It could provide an overall structure to the organization, members and communication if an Executive Director was introduced to GEN. This would also entail making GEN visible to the travel industry and create awareness about ecotourism. In order to hire an Executive Director, GEN would need donations and could introduce membership fees in the future.

The analysis in Chapter 6 stated that GEN's biggest challenge is informing the world about ecotourism and sustainable tourism. GEN creates value for their members by developing members' engagement, executing organizational structure, receiving donations and optimizing human resources.

FURTHER RESEARCH

As the discussion in Chapter 7 show there is a great deal of areas that can be researched further. In order to develop GEN, research within communication systems would be of great value to their members. This would further help attract new members and thereby support their mission of becoming an umbrella organization for ecotourism. Interviews with current members and allies would also bring light to how GEN could be developed further.

As described in the analysis in Chapter 6, it is GEN's plan to get donations to cover their expenses. Further research should investigate methods for how to become appealing for potential investors.

Lastly, as the discussion in Chapter 7 revealed, there is also a foundation to further explore if GEN should implement a membership fee later in their development stages.

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