



**University
of Victoria**

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

JACKIE ZIEGLER

MSc (University of Victoria, 2011)

BSc (University of Guelph, 2005)

**“Conservation outcomes and sustainability of whale shark tourism
in the Philippines”**

Department of Geography

Tuesday, April 16, 2019

1:00 P.M.

Clearihue Building

Room B007

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Philip Dearden, Department of Geography, University of Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. Richard Rollins, Department of Geography, UVic (Member)

Dr. Natalie Ban, School of Environmental Studies, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Michael Lück, School of Hospitality and Tourism, Auckland University of Technology

Chair of Oral Examination:

Prof. Maureen Bradley, Department of Writing, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies

Abstract

Biodiversity loss is one of the major environmental threats facing the planet. Incentive-based conservation is one means to reduce human pressure on wildlife by providing economic incentives for resource-dependent people to protect the environment. Marine wildlife tourism is one of the fastest growing tourism sectors globally and is viewed as an important incentive-based approach for achieving marine conservation goals. However, few studies have linked participation in the provisioning of marine wildlife tourism activities with positive social and ecological conservation outcomes. The goal of this dissertation is to provide greater understanding of the conservation value of marine wildlife tourism using whale shark tourism as a case study with a main focus on social conservation outcomes amongst tourism providers. Positive changes in perceptions, attitudes and values towards target species and their environments can be an important element of incentive-based conservation. The study has the following objectives: (1) to assess the status of the global whale shark tourism industry, including types (e.g., captive, non-captive), real and potential impacts, conservation value and management challenges and best practices; (2) to examine the ethics of provisioning whale sharks in Oslob, Philippines, the largest, non-captive viewing site in the world; (3) to determine if working in ecotourism changed the attitudes and behaviours of locals towards whale sharks and the ocean, and if tourism type affects those outcomes; (4) to assess the marine wildlife value orientations of locals working in whale shark tourism to achieve greater understanding of the factors influencing their conservation attitudes and behaviours; (5) to explore the potential long-term impacts of poorly conceived incentive-based conservation projects on social and ecological conservation outcomes; and (6) to re-examine and update the conceptual and theoretical background for wildlife tourism in light of the findings of this study. Methods include a comprehensive literature review, tourist surveys, social media content analysis, and interviews with locals working in whale shark tourism at four sites in the Philippines. Results suggest that marine wildlife tourism can play an important role in changing locals' attitudes and behaviours towards the focal species and habitat; however, smaller-scale, more established sites had greater conservation value than the mass tourism or failed sites suggesting that small-scale, community-based ecotourism is the best approach to meeting conservation goals of marine wildlife tourism. Yet, few tourism sites meet these standards. Global standards are needed to ensure whale shark tourism activities meet desired conservation goals. Such standards should include management requirements (e.g., licensing, mandatory education program) and interaction guidelines (e.g. minimum viewing distances, limits on the number of swimmers/boats, etc.). The findings also emphasise that economics should not be the only or primary metric used to measure conservation success; rather, the focus should be on assessing a more comprehensive range of social and ecological conservation outcomes of these activities.