

Success rates of habitat restoration projects in Dominica

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to observe the current status of the number and the level of progress in habitat restoration or ecological conservation projects on the island of Dominica. A survey was given to people of different backgrounds in order to obtain their personal opinion on the state of the island's natural habitats. After their interviews were finished, all information was gathered and it was determined that there is not one consistent answer to the questions asked. All interviewees saw the state of the island at different levels of progress. However there was a pattern where majority of the people interviewed think that the biggest problem restoration/conservation projects face are the government, that the population does not wish to be on an industrialized island and that there are big pieces of the island that have yet to be disturbed by man.

Introduction

Islands in the Caribbean have been largely converted into urban space to attract tourists, commerce, and to provide for the ever growing population, all to improve the economics of the region. There are some exceptions however Dominica has been coined as the 'Nature Island' because its environment has been left largely untouched by man. The main reason as to why this island has been left unindustrialized is due to its natural landscape which contains rugged terrain, natural waterfalls, and shifting soils. The main form of commerce used to be the movement of bananas and some citrus (ECCB 2009); however, it is slowly but surely moving into the trade of eco-tourism. Given that this new type of tourism business is becoming the first source of revenue for a big percentage of the island's population, it would be a likely that restoration and conservational projects would be abundant in Dominica. It would also make sense that the

primary foundation for monetary support for the projects would come from the island's government itself. However, much of the ongoing island projects are in fact damaging the environment more so than they are helping conserve it, like the construction of two five star hotels, and the ongoing geothermal construction on the borders of the Monte Trois Pitons National Park. It is especially hard to create restoration or conservational projects on islands simply due to the fact that there is limited space and tools (Lagabrielle, Rouget et al. 2011); however, thanks to the local support for the environmental movement and minor organizations, small conservation, restoration and adaptation projects are well underway on Dominica.

Materials and Methods

An eight question survey was given to five different interviewees. The interviews were done in person and recorded with a voice messaging application on an iPhone, a voice recorder, and written down in paper. The questions were: 1) Do you know of any currently active restoration/conservation projects? If so, can you name some? 2) Are these projects, in your opinion positively affecting the restoration of the island's natural habitat? 3) What do you think is the biggest problem in Dominica when it comes to restoring or conserving a site? 4) Do you believe the people of Dominica wish to have these projects? Or do they wish to instead push for a more industrialized island? Why do you think this is so? 5) Do you believe that educating the public on the side effects of living in an industrialized world would make Dominicans choose to conserve their surroundings? 6) Can you name a specific type of environment that is the being threatened the most on this island? 7) What do you believe is the reason behind the damaged habitat? And 8) Do you think any Dominican habitat has been left untouched by man? The five interviewers where parts of different points of views when it comes to restoration and conservational ecology: a married couple who are members of DomSeTCO, a member of the

Dominican Youth Environmental Organization, a member of the wildlife and forestry division, an agent in a small grant program, and a conservationist tour guide.

Results

The first person to be interviewed was Kent Augiste, a tour guide who considers himself to be a conservational ecologist and is a very active member of the Kalinago Territory. He mentioned how there are a few projects going on here in Dominica but that the majority of them are “twisted,” meaning that they would create a site to focus on Dominica’s natural sceneries but that the making of these sites damaged the habitat surrounding it, much like the Waitukubuli National Trail that extends itself across the whole island of Dominica. He also mentioned that the biggest obstacles for habitat restoration and conservation projects are the government and the rest of the Dominican population. According to him, about 60% of the population would like for Dominica to follow the majority of the world’s footsteps and grow to be a fully industrialized island. However, he also mentioned that if education about industrialization’s negatives was brought to the population, this percentage would drastically change.

The second interview was to Agnes Esprit, a member of the GEF (Global Environmental Facility) organization. According to her, there are 36 current conservation and adaptation projects on the island, and that non-governmental organizations along with the population, are doing more than their share to conserve the habitats that make up the Commonwealth of Dominica. Like Mr. Augiste, Agnes thought that the biggest problem was and still is the lack of political will and the reluctance of the government to make firm decisions. She mentioned how the Dominican people do not wish to push for industrialization, they relish in the abundance on nature that surrounds them, and that they wish to keep it that way. The environments that are

most affect by the housing developments are the local watersheds and rivers. However, she also mentioned that the majority of Dominica is still left untouched by man.

The next interview was with Albert Galleon, a member of the forestry division of Dominica. Unlike the previous interviews, he thought that no real rehabilitation projects had been done since Hurricane David destroyed most of the island in 1979. According to his point of view the biggest problem in conservation is the government; he said that the government needs to implement laws in which whenever there is a construction, conservation methods must be incorporated in the construction plan in order to make sure the environment around the construction area is kept intact even after construction is done. His opinion was also that the population of Dominica does not in fact want to industrialize any further since they already know the bad implications that come in hand with the urbanization and industrialization of land.

Another interview was with Terry Riman, the executive director of the Dominica Youth Environmental Organization. He said how the biggest project currently operating was the Cabrits National Park restoration project, where they are trying to restore the buildings of Fort Shirley to its natural state, but he also mentioned that all other projects currently happening are small scale restoration of citrus plantation mills run by the local population. Unlike other interviews, Terry said how the biggest problem for restoration/conservation projects is the lack of money. Usually their monetary income comes from a different array of distributors, government, private sector, charities, only to name a few. His interview was different from the rest also, in the fact that he does not believe educating the small public that wishes to go fully industrial will change anything, "they are set in their ways," he says. On the brighter side though, he mentions that these people are the minority in Dominica. Like Agnes, Terry agreed that the habitats which are the most affected are the watersheds and rivers being impacted by the large amount of domestic

house building. Finally, he mentioned that there are vast areas of Dominica which have yet to be touched by humans.

Finally, the last interview was to the Harris's. They are an elderly couple working for DomSeTCO, which is an organization that helps the community and sea turtle's coexist in the same habitat. This program helps by educating the community, finding a sustainable balance and by the scientific gathering of different data on sea turtles. They mentioned that the biggest problem for restoration is the lack of education on the communities about how their normal practices affect natural environments. Like a majority of the past interviews they said they fully believe Dominicans have been able to preserve Dominica as an island untouched by temptations that come from TV and the internet. They even regard majority of the population of the Commonwealth of Dominica as environmentally conscious. Lastly, they also believe that a big majority of this island has been kept untouched by man.

Discussion

After reviewing the comments of 5 interviewees the three surveyors it was determined that there was no question were all interviewers answered the same. One reason as to why interviewees gave different answers could be because they are all focused on different areas of restoration ecology. However, there were three questions (Q#3, Q#4, and Q#8) were the majority of the interviewees agreed.

The first commonality was that the biggest problem Dominica faces when it comes to habitat restoration or conservation is the local government. Programs and even governmental areas involved with the ecology of Dominica get very different amounts of exposure; for example, the Harris couple, mentioned that the government had been great towards their organization because

of the support and exposure they had given both of their organizations, both DomSeTCO and RoSTI, while Mr. Galleon said that the amount of disclosure to the public about forestry problems is minimal to none, even though Mr. Galleon works for the government of Dominica itself. Other perceived issues with government are the inability to make decisions and act on those decisions, and concern at not being reelected or being excluded from future political decision making them reluctant of taking a firm stance on ecological problems.

The second thing all interviews shared was that the Dominican populace wishes to stay in the level of industrialization that they are in now. Mr. Terry mentioned how Dominican don't want to destroy Dominica in order to build, but they wish to work around what the island of Dominica has in order to improve what they already have. When asked this question, Mr. Harris advised to change the wording of it, because whoever was being interviewed might be offended that one was even suggesting that the Dominican population might want to change the state of the island.

The last thing that most interviewees agreed on was that this island still has its mysteries. They believe that there are complete habitats that have been left untouched by man. They may have been discovered already, but they have been preserved and maintained as they were found. Much like Mrs. Harris said, there are places like Morne Diablotin, Boiling Lake, and Middleham Falls where the only people who will hike to these sites are the type of people who will truly appreciate nature and will conserve its natural habitat; therefore, a lot of Dominica's natural environments have been discovered, but not disturbed.

A possible error could have been caused due to the small number of interviewers. Having a larger amount of surveyors could have pointed to a pattern and given more results. A second possibility of an error is the fact that since some of the interviewers work for a much larger

organization and, their answers could have been the opinion of the organization rather than their own, causing biased results.

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