

Report on Master Thesis

Institute of Economic Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University in Prague

Student:	Bc. Alicia Maria Berrios
Advisor:	Mgr. Milan Ščasný, Ph.D.
Title of the thesis:	Are sharks worth more alive than dead? A stated preference study on shark ecotourism in Costa Rica

OVERALL ASSESSMENT (provided in English, Czech, or Slovak):

The thesis concerns an economic-environmental issue, in particular, the goal of the thesis is to estimate the value of a live shark that can draw tourists to Costa Rica to see or dive with in terms of willingness to pay for conservation of the shark population, in contrast to its value in meat and other body parts when hunted and killed which brings some shark species close to extinction.

The contribution of the thesis is twofold. The first part of work on the research question involved design of a survey and data collection in Costa Rica. The second part of the project involved processing and performing an analysis of the collected data and drawing conclusions which resulted from the performed experiment. Here, I must highlight the construction of the survey questionnaire and precise technique to collect data with high representativeness and paying attention to quotas on gender, sex, country of residence etc such that the obtained sample matches population characteristics of tourists visiting Costa Rica. However, as the author thanks quite a large number of people that contributed to this part of work, so it is difficult for me to evaluate the respective contribution of the author of the thesis.

Unfortunately, the survey design is the only element of the thesis that I would have no objection to. The author made an extremely sloppy job in several aspects of the thesis. First of all, the text is heavily corrupted by typos and confusing (non-English-like) sentences which are hard to understand and thus I found it very difficult to read the text and get the meaning intended by the author. The author provided an errata during my evaluation of the thesis, however, it concerns only typos and by my estimate less than one fifth of total typos I have uncovered.

The literature review did not have a clear logical structure and I found it unnecessarily long and, on occasion, repetitive. The methodology part did not leverage the potential to explain in detail the analytical tools that were applied in the numerical part. In this part of the text I was already tired on random occurrence of new acronyms which were not explained upon their first occurrence in the text. I was able to find some in the list of acronyms, but e.g. CDLGT (page 25 line 1) or RUM (page 25 line 10) and some other were impossible for me to decipher; on the other hand, some acronyms I find completely unnecessary, e.g. SQ for status quo which beyond its introduction on page 20 occurs just once more in the text. Starting with the first table and figure on page 20, the author leaves the reader in total confusion regarding the numbering and referencing in the text. Some table and figures do not match the comments in the text. E.g. Figure and Table 2 should correspond and I find it very confusing that Table 2 in characteristics „shark populations“ does not contain level „50% less“ if, as claimed, policies in figure 1 were sampled from table 2. Linear indirect utility „formula“ presented on top of page 22 is completely unreadable. There is not sufficiently explained why two experiments designs are considered (DCE and DBDC – fortunately these acronyms can be found in the list), whether it is a standard technique in similar studies and what is the link in between them. The attempts of presenting mathematics around page 24, and further, is disastrous. Link between (1), (2) and (3) is unexplained, it is further corrupted by confusing comments, e.g. page 24 line 4 from below refers to alphas in (1) but equation (1) contains no alpha; probability on page 24 last line depends on indices i and j only but is called „probability that alternative k is chosen“ and on page 25 line 2 the formula contains a different notation of these probabilities; fraction on page 25 line 7 from below is called „equation“, yet it contains no equality sign; page 26 formula (2b) (why (2b) if there were previously formulas (1)-(3) is beyond my comprehension) contains variable „SPECIE“ and the text below explains „SPECIES“; there is a confusion about notation of indices i and l ; page 27 last line there is G missing in the formula; page 28 in formula on lines 7 and 8 the two last terms are identical (and yet I am sure they should not be). From this perspective, I was left with no possibility of

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understanding of the theoretical background whatsoever and with strong suspicion that neither is the author of this thesis. Similar confusing inconsistencies can be found in section 4. E.g. a „2-day pilot“ was carried out „between July 26-28th, 2016“, which is total three days. On page 31 line 6 the author states that 800 interviews were completed, while Table 4 states sample of size 801; in Table 5 the stated numbers of respondents add up to strictly less than 800 (nor 801), in Table 7 it adds up to more than 801 (to 818 to be exact), in Table 8 each factor contains identical number of respondents of 781 (which is rather suspicious). To make it even more bizarre, in section 5.2 the author states that the number of respondents were 780 and that the „pooled data“ are of size 1 566. The last paragraph on page 35 states that there were 3% of „protesters“ (as 97% trusted the information) while on page the author states that there „may be 1%“ of „protesters“. Either I do not understand the term „protestor“ or there is some obvious mistake. In results presented in section 5, I found several confusing conclusions drawn. E.g., I find it very strange that whenever the estimated coefficient is negative (and significantly non-zero), the reported WTP value is positive just like when the estimated coefficient is positive. This can be found in Table 13 model 1B for „BEACHxVISIT“ and „TURTLExSEE“; similarly also in Table 14 („CORAL x CS AMERICA“ and „CORAL x AFR ASIA“) and in several instances also in tables 16 and 17. Overall, sections 4 and 5 are made to look extensive by excessive use of technical tables which could have easily be part of appendix (or annex?). This is far from being a complete list of found shortcomings.

To summarize in one sentence, this study is a shameless waste of perfectly good data set. Unless the author provides detailed explanation of the theoretical background, corrects all inconsistencies, improves the poor and confusing presentation of „results“ and complements the achieved results with logical and flawless discussion and comments, I see no value added in the presented results – even more, I find it dangerous to any reader to be exposed to results in this form, the more dangerous if this is intended to serve as the basis for an environmental policy of Costa Rica. My recommendation for the defense committee would be to either award grade 4 and ask for a thorough revision of the thesis or award the thesis with grade 3 in case at least the performance during the presentation is satisfactory.

SUMMARY OF POINTS AWARDED (for details, see below):

CATEGORY	POINTS
<i>Literature</i> (max. 20 points)	10
<i>Methods</i> (max. 30 points)	20
<i>Contribution</i> (max. 30 points)	10
<i>Manuscript Form</i> (max. 20 points)	0
TOTAL POINTS (max. 100 points)	40
GRADE (1 – 2 – 3 – 4)	4

NAME OF THE REFEREE: RNDr. Michal Červinka, Ph.D.

DATE OF EVALUATION: January 17, 2017

Referee Signature

EXPLANATION OF CATEGORIES AND SCALE:

LITERATURE REVIEW: *The thesis demonstrates author's full understanding and command of recent literature. The author quotes relevant literature in a proper way.*

Strong Average Weak
20 10 0

METHODS: *The tools used are relevant to the research question being investigated, and adequate to the author's level of studies. The thesis topic is comprehensively analyzed.*

Strong Average Weak
30 15 0

CONTRIBUTION: *The author presents original ideas on the topic demonstrating critical thinking and ability to draw conclusions based on the knowledge of relevant theory and empirics. There is a distinct value added of the thesis.*

Strong Average Weak
30 15 0

MANUSCRIPT FORM: *The thesis is well structured. The student uses appropriate language and style, including academic format for graphs and tables. The text effectively refers to graphs and tables and disposes with a complete bibliography.*

Strong Average Weak
20 10 0

Overall grading:

TOTAL POINTS	GRADE		
81 – 100	1	= excellent	= výborně
61 – 80	2	= good	= velmi dobře
41 – 60	3	= satisfactory	= dobře
0 – 40	4	= fail	= nedoporučuji k obhajobě