

# Ecotourism as A Climate Adaption Tool: Perspectives from Local Tourism Stakeholders in Lunenburg

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## Introduction

Tourism industries are increasingly identified as a highly climate-sensitive sector vulnerable to environmental and socioeconomic changes. 6 Similarly, coastal communities on the Canadian east coast are found at risk of climate change impacts in the future. 4

The municipality of the district of Lunenburg is chosen as a case study due to its vulnerability to losing its UNESCO World Heritage status and as a small coastal community dependent on tourism.

As one of the main stakeholders, tourism operators, particularly in small coastal communities, have rarely been included in research studies about the perception of and preparedness for climate change. 3

Researchers and professional bodies still struggle to provide a consistent ecotourism definition, which results in confusion and unclarity among stakeholders in understanding the term. Although ecotourism has been widely applied as a conservation tool, it is rarely represented as a potential climate adaptation strategy.

As part of the SSHRC grant research project: "Towards a Coastal Adaptation and Vulnerability Assessment Model for Tourism in Small Coastal Communities (CAVA)," the study results contribute to a better understanding of how coastal communities can increase resiliency and further our knowledge of local stakeholders' perspectives on ecotourism as a tool for adaptation.



## Results

Figure 1: Main ecotourism definitions representing interviewees' understanding of the concept

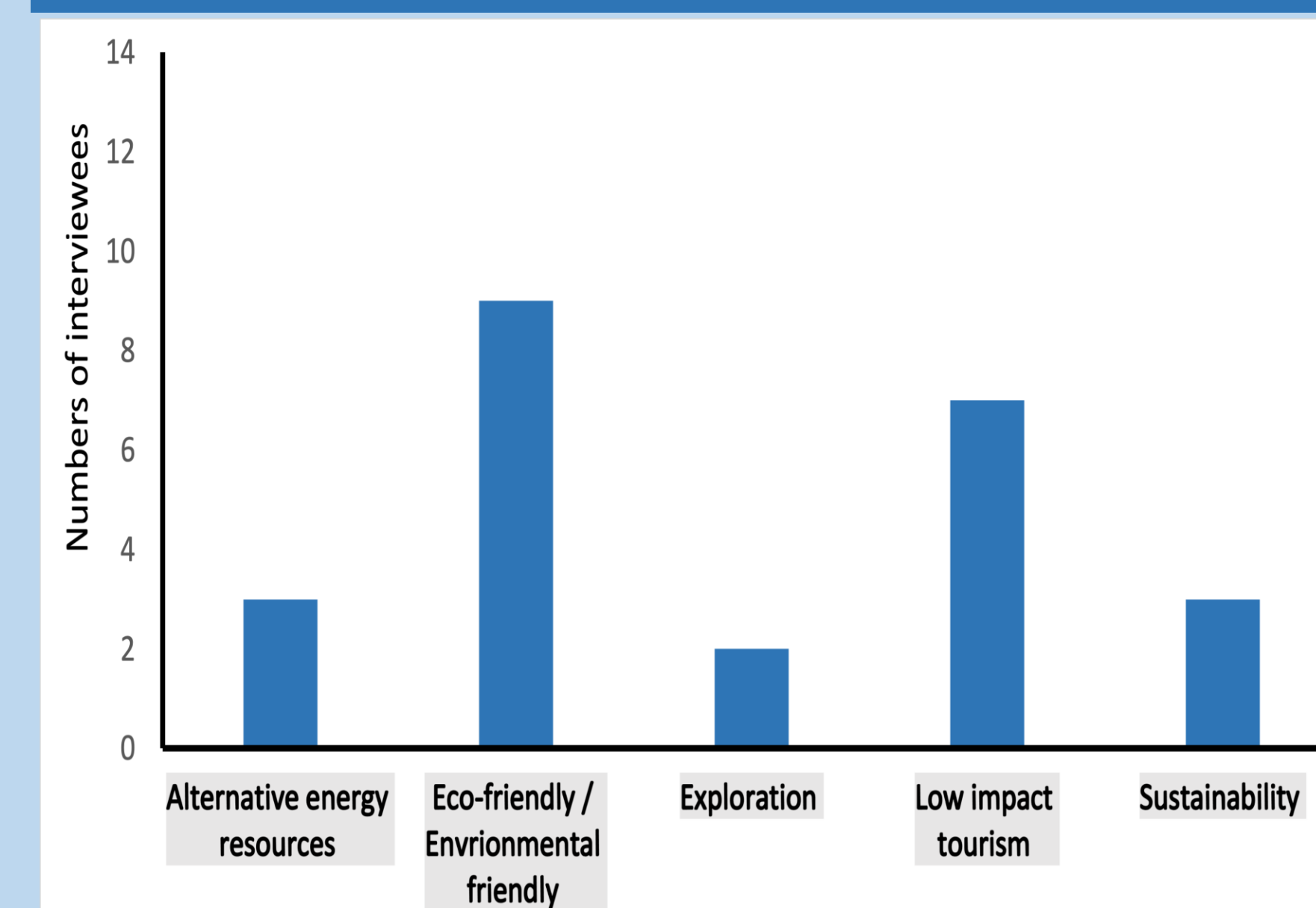


Figure 2: Main ecotourism definitions gathered from literature

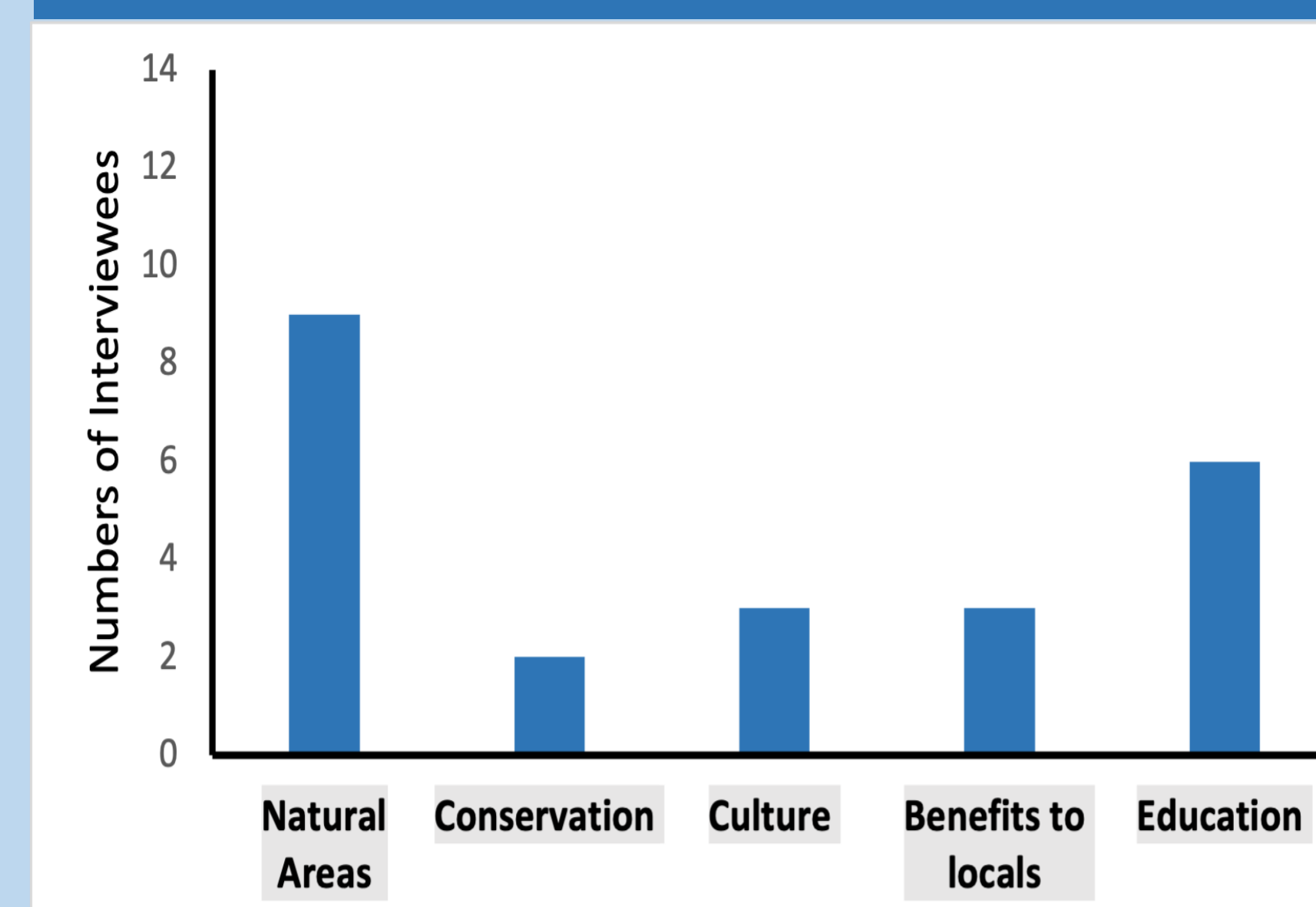


Figure 3: Interviewees' opinions of ecotourism as a climate adaption tool

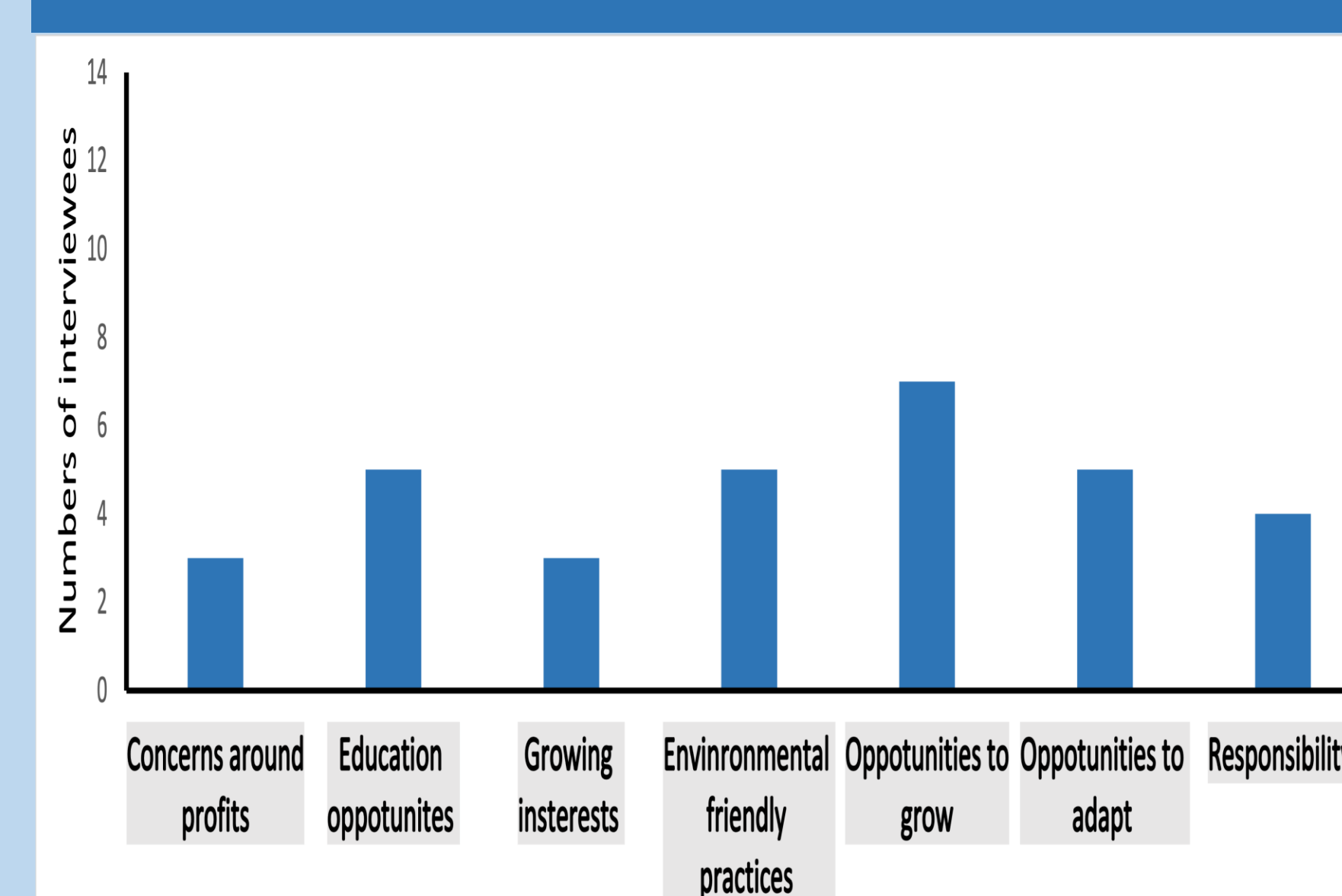
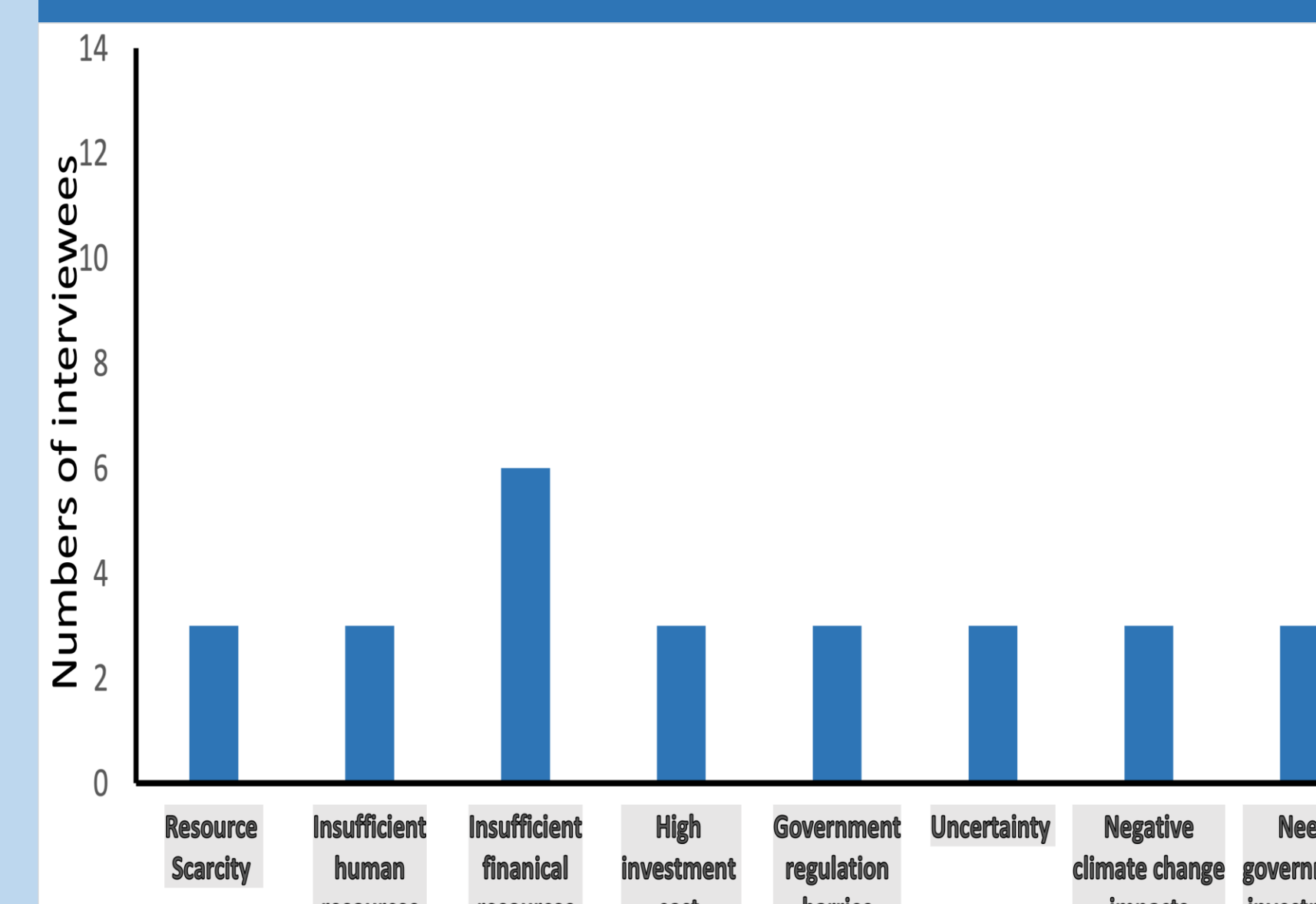


Figure 4: Interviewees' perceptions of ecotourism implementation barriers



## Discussion



### Key informants' understanding of the concept of ecotourism:

The definition discrepancy of ecotourism documented in the literature mirrors our interview results in Fig.1. **Eco-Friendly/Environmentally friendly and Low impact tourism** turned out to be the top two outstanding themes that emerged from key informants' understanding of the ecotourism concept. Within the five ecotourism definition principles identified from the literature, **Natural Areas and Education** were referenced most by key informants in this study 1



### Key informants' opinion on ecotourism as a climate adaption strategy:

Although ecotourism is seldomly applied in climate adaption, key informants in this study prospect ecotourism development to help the sector adapt to future changes as **environmentally friendly practices**. They believe there are **opportunities for ecotourism to grow and expand**. They think **ecotourism will help the sector adapt** because it has worked well in the past to diversify the economy. Additionally, many respondents referred to opportunities for them to provide history, traditional knowledge, and skills **education to visitors** with ecotourism implementation, such as sustaining valuable lessons to work with the environment and collaborating with environmental organizations to offer scientific research or training opportunities.



### Key informants' perception of ecotourism implementation barriers:

Five main implementation barriers identified in the literature align with responses from the interviews: insufficient financial and human resources, uncertainty, the lack of governmental support, and resource scarcity 2&5. In particular, **insufficient financial resources** stand out as the most significant ecotourism implementation barrier for respondents in Lunenburg, mainly due to high business investment and operational costs. Lastly, it is commonly agreed that ecotourism development in Lunenburg would primarily **benefit from appropriate government investments** in the tourism industry, nature conservation, and the overall promotion of the tourism sector in Nova Scotia.



## Research/Interview questions:

1. How do key tourism stakeholders in Lunenburg understand the concept of ecotourism?
2. Do they consider ecotourism an adaptation strategy for the sector to adapt to future changes?
3. What are perceived barriers to implementing of ecotourism in the sector?

## Methods



### Literature Review:

A comprehensive literature review that covered peer-reviewed and grey literature was conducted to provide background information to the thesis. Significant findings of the varying definitions of ecotourism and barriers to implementation were used to guide the development of a codebook for deductive coding to analyze the interview data.



### Interviews:

Interviews were conducted with 14 key informants selected from local tourism stakeholders in Lunenburg based on their business relevance to ecotourism. The semi structured interview technique allowed for gathering in-depth information according to the conversation flow.



### Data Analysis:

NVivo software was used to organize and identify repeated themes through both, deductive and inductive coding.

Content analysis was used to a) capture 5 main ecotourism definition principles and 7 ecotourism implementation barriers across interviewees' responses, and b) to investigate if patterns align with existing literature research findings.



## Conclusion

1. Generally, key informants interviewed in this study understand ecotourism as one eco-friendly or environmentally **friendly** tourism that mainly **operates in natural areas with low impacts on the local environment**.
2. Respondents in this study favor **utilizing ecotourism as a climate adaptation strategy** for the sector. In their opinion, ecotourism possesses massive potential in providing scientific, history, traditional knowledge education to visitors besides its environmentally friendly focus
3. **Insufficient financial resource** account for the most significant ecotourism implementation barriers for many key informants in this study, and their demand for **appropriate government investments** are apparent. The government should receive the most attention to introducing policies and incentive programs to help promote ecotourism development in Lunenburg as one climate adaptation strategy.

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