ABORIGINAL CULTURAL TOURISM-MI’KMAQ ETHICS

The literature of the birth and growth of aboriginal cultural tourism is briefly explored with applications in the Mi’kmaq First Nation. Section 6, Research Involving Aboriginal People of the Tri-Council Policy Statement is presented as a guide and blueprint for tourism marketing researchers.

Cultural tourism

While it is only in the past few decades that the term cultural tourism has become widely used, the practice is arguably millennia old. The Romans traveled to Egypt to witness a civilization and culture that preceded their own by at least two thousand years and a century ago, the grand tours of Europe, were considered a prerequisite for the wealthy and the nobility (ICOMOS, 1996).

In the late 1970’s and early 1980’s the term cultural tourism began to be used by the industry, but was still referring to a niche market which was perceived to be small, affluent and well educated (Tighe, 1986, McKercher and du Cros 2002). At the 12th general assembly of ICOMOS in Mexico, 1999, the international council adopted the International Cultural Tourism Charter (ICOMOS, 1999). The charter recognizes the organic relationship between tourism and cultural heritage and the increasing tensions that can develop as communities and cultures try to protect their heritage while “packaging” it for tourism consumption. ICOMOS recognize defining cultural tourism is difficult as the topic means different and at times conflicting things to different people. The World Tourism Organization defines cultural tourism as “movements of persons essentially for cultural motivations such as study tours, performing arts and cultural tours, travel to festivals and other events, visits to sites and monuments, travel to study nature, folklore or art and pilgrimages” (WTO, 1985).

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1 Acknowledgement, Ian Morrison, Cape Breton University student researcher.
Authenticity of experience and product for the cultural tourist is increasingly raised in the literature (Nara, 1993, Chhabra, Healy and Sills 2003, Cano and Mysyk 2004). What is the real cultural experience? Is the cultural experience being presented to the tourist authentic or has it become part of the current cultural experience of the community and therefore represented as culturally current?

A heated debate on the topic of cultural tourism is present in many community and cultural groups, but none more so than in First Nation communities. Cultural tourism is seen by some community leaders as both a method of economic development opportunities and cultural revival. Aspects of the Mi’kmaq First Nation in general and the First Nations of Cape Breton Island in particular will be explored further as an exemplar of a growing niche in cultural tourism.

**Aboriginal tourism**

Aboriginal Cultural Tourism in Canada is poised for future growth and development. This industry is on the cusp of major developments that are important not only for Aboriginal Communities and those interested in learning more about Aboriginal culture and history, but also for those interested in marketing and marketing research issues that are specific to First Nations research.

In the last decade, Canadian Aboriginal communities have developed a tourism structure to assist their communities in the development of their tourism product. It has only been since the 1990s that Indigenous tourism development in Canada and elsewhere has become a focal point for economic development. These communities are looking towards the cultural and adventure tourism sector as a means of creating jobs, building local economies, and providing youth with a future (Hager, 2003). Some Aboriginal people see an opportunity to regain control over their lands through “cultural tourism”.

**Strategic partnerships**

The need for a common and integrated Aboriginal Cultural Tourism strategy is essential for sustainable development in this growing industry. Aboriginal tourism, managed by Indigenous communities alone or in cooperation with outside agencies, may be an opportunity to take control of the tourism industry, guiding and moderating its impacts as well as distributing the benefits more equitably (Kortight, 2002). Tourism is about partnering, and nowhere is this more relevant than in the Aboriginal tourism industry, since Aboriginal people are commonly newcomers to this niche market. Bringing people together to discuss common goals can be accomplished through the creation of an Aboriginal tourism organization, or a sub-committee of the existing regional tourism industry (Hager, 2003). However, such partnerships are not easily developed. Notzke (2004) notes there is considerable demand for Aboriginal tourism experiences, but that they (the tourism industry) do not know enough about what is available, and to what degree it is up to standard. There is a perceived lack of reliability and consistency, particularly in advance planning and long-term supplier commitment.
The message from Aboriginal Elders is unequivocal: “aboriginal spirituality is not for sale, and there is not a place for spiritual ceremonies in tourism products.” That message needs to be communicated to the tourism industry. On the other side there is lack of knowledge and appreciation by the Aboriginal communities of the “business requirements” in the tourism industry and the conditions and benefits of such partnerships (Notzke, 1994).

A new trend

Research to date on Aboriginal Cultural Tourism is recent and limited: “A new trend was developed during the early and mid-1990s, when the concept of Aboriginal tourism became a ‘hot topic’ nationwide” (Notzke, 2004). The Aboriginal Tourism debate in Canada during the 1990’s is that Aboriginal people have been adamant that the concept of “Aboriginal tourism” should designate only those tourism ventures which are characterized by Aboriginal ownership and control. Notzke (2004) notes that the new millennium is bringing great projections for Aboriginal tourism. The tourism industry associations in Canada are focusing on newly established or planned Aboriginal tourism ventures.

The industry needs to look at what challenges this relatively new niche product which operates in a very distinct cultural, socio-economic and political environment already encounters. There has been little opportunity to coordinate with other Aboriginal tourism products, due to the lack of development and market-readiness. These challenges are experienced by all Aboriginal cultures regardless of their geographic location.

Notzke’s (1994) research highlights three important facets which need to be developed: the professional development of an Aboriginal tourism product; market development; and the evolution of a partnership between Aboriginal tourism product suppliers and the travel trade. The concerns which her research addresses deal with how well the Aboriginal tourism product fits with market demand and the host society’s socio-cultural background: what quality partnerships are fully utilized by Aboriginal product suppliers and tour operations: and what is the travellers’ degree of interest in the Aboriginal tourism experiences and are their expectations and preferences realistic.

Cultural tourism products

Cultural Tourism Products will not only enhance the economic well-being of Aboriginal peoples, but will also allow First Nations to communicate to other Canadians and visitors to this country the history of their land and people and their contributions in Canada (Campbell, 1994). Blundell (1996) notes that cultural tourism can generate benefits for the Canadian tourist industry and can at the same time provide a means of economic development for marginal areas which market themselves for tourism.
Handicrafts provide a wealth of tradition to the interested buyer. Products range from traditional and authentic high-priced items such as beadwork or porcupine quillwork and jewelry and modern moccasins, to paintings and drawings. Notzke (1994) mentions that Aboriginal artists and craft producers face such issues as limited availability of traditional raw materials, lack of financial and business management skills, finances and marketing, educating the market about the effort involved in producing certain items, and competition with mass-produced “native type” souvenirs.

Living culture is also experienced in spiritual, social and cultural events and celebrations. One native tradition that stands out and sharply contrasts with non-native traditions in particular is powwows. The powwow is a spiritual dance, which has evolved into a social event, where everybody is welcome to witness competitive dancing in elaborately crafted outfits to the accompaniment of drumming and singing. The powwows that are increasingly seen on Cape Breton Island and elsewhere in the Maritimes are “largely modern Ojibwa in origin with a strong Plains influence” (Prins, 1996). This adaptation of broader Pan-Indian influences raises questions of authenticity of experience (Nara 1993, Chhabra, Healy and Sills 2003, Cano and Mysyk 2004). What must be clear to the tourist is that the experience is authentically Aboriginal, however the “tribal authenticity” may be somewhat blurred.

A community’s location can in itself be a “tourist attraction”. The natural environment is at the very heart of native culture. Even though Aboriginals do not depend on the land for their survival, their cultural and political identity is still derived from their bonds with the land. Although the land may not be in prime condition, tourists could still experience the land in a traditional Indigenous manner. Notzke (1994) argues that travellers want their experience to be grounded in reality, that is to be authentic, and they want a connection with today’s representatives of the culture which they have come to sample.

While much of the “traditional” lifestyle of the Mi’kmaw has become modernized, the Mi’kmaw language, legends, the waltes-game and St. Anne’s Day, some pre-European contact and others closely associated with the Roman Catholic Church, are deeply integrated into the Mi’kmaw culture (Hornborg, 2001). A debate rages in some communities around “constructed” culture and traditionalist (Prins, 1996). Since the mid 1970’s there has been deep interest by many Mi’kmaw in ecological and spiritual issues. This ecospiritualism combines traditions of the Cree, Ojibway and Lakota Sioux with “New Age’ spiritualism oftentimes attributed to west coast United States. The current traditions of sweetgrass ceremonies and drumming are adopted traditions (Prins, 1996). These adopted traditions have become infused with the Mi’kmaw to become a part of their current culture.

**Atlantic aboriginal health research program (AAHRP) workshops**

The modern Mi’kmaw are fiercely protective of their past and living culture while recognizing the potential of bringing portions of this culture to the non-Aboriginal world. Both the tourism practitioner and researcher alike, must be mindful of ethical issues surrounding Aboriginal market research. Many communities within the First Nations have developed research
ethic committees and determine which research is and is not permissible within a First Nation Community.

Since the adoption of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS) in 1998, there has been a general acknowledgement that Section 6, Research Involving Aboriginal People, requires further development. In July 2003, the three funding councils, Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), National Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) and Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) committed to a collaboration intended to produce a revised Section 6 of the TCPS. This collaboration will give Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people an opportunity to express their concerns and provide suggestions on Research Ethics and Aboriginal People.

On May 5, 2005, key Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community-based personnel, University researchers, elders and others from across the Atlantic region, met at the Wagmatook Culture and Heritage Centre, Wagmatcook, Nova Scotia, to review a set of draft guidelines (Appendix 1) prepared by a national committee, the Aboriginal Ethics Working Group (AEWG). The Atlantic Aboriginal Health Research Program (AAHRP) was asked to meet with those interested from universities and communities in the Atlantic region to discuss the proposed guidelines and make recommendations. This workshop is one in a series of sessions held by the AAHRP on Research Ethics and Aboriginal People in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Labrador. Information gathered from these workshops will be provided to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research-Institute of Aboriginal Peoples Health (CIHR-IAPH) to develop health research ethics guidelines that will respond to pressing needs of Aboriginal people and communities.

According to the AEWG, the definition of health within Aboriginal conceptions of the term is broad; therefore, this code may also apply to research on issues not typically considered to be “health” research, such as Aboriginal tourism.

In the AEWG guidelines, Aboriginal peoples are recognized as having a distinct political, legal and cultural governance structure. They have decision-making authority on a range of matters including research projects that directly affect the community. An elder or sacred society may be accountable to the Creator, the Land, or past and future generations for their knowledge. The researcher must share in this accountability as well.

Conclusion

Cultural tourism in general and Aboriginal cultural tourism specifically has tremendous growth potential for the broader tourism industry. However, more needs to be done in the area of research involving Aboriginal peoples. The original text of Section 6 of the Tri-Council Guidelines is intended to serve as a starting point for such discussions. The Councils (CIHR, SSHRC and NSERC) have not held sufficient discussions with representatives of the affected peoples or groups. Therefore, based on the original Tri-Council Guidelines, the Councils have decided that it is not yet appropriate to establish policies in this area.
Clearly an understanding of research practice and sharing of knowledge between researcher and Aboriginal communities is currently needed. There is lack of understanding on both sides in relation to the gathering, sharing and dissemination of research information collected. Issues such as these are topics of discussion in the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, regardless of location. These concerns affect research gathering in any area, such as health or cultural tourism, where direct involvement of Aboriginal peoples is encountered.

Amendments to Section 6 of the Tri-Council Guidelines are still in their infancy. Qualitative data collected from other workshops conducted in Nova Scotia and surrounding provinces is still being compiled. A final report will be prepared for CIHR and will be distributed, for further review and consultation, to all those who attended a workshop on Research Ethics and Aboriginal Peoples.

Blundell (1996) notes that as Aboriginal peoples gain a real say in how their cultures are to be aligned with tourism: “these relations can be transformed”. There must be a way to conduct research and market Aboriginal tourism offerings in ways that are respectful of Aboriginal peoples. For this to happen there must be public policies to promote and empower Aboriginal peoples to determine how their cultures are represented to tourists.

In addition to the stated ethical and cultural sensitivities, the marketer must have a clear understanding of authentic and reconstructed culture to ensure both the product is accurately represented and the consumer/tourist is satisfied with their experience/purchase.

Until Section 6 of the existing Tri-Council guidelines is amended, much debate around the collection, storage and dissemination of data by researchers from Aboriginal communities will persist. Ethical principles, standards and procedures need to be articulated in the revised Tri-Council Guidelines so as not to harm the participant Aboriginal communities and researchers or spoil future research opportunities.
APPENDIX 1

Articles from AEWG Guidelines Discussed/Amended at Atlantic Aboriginal Community Workshops

Article 1
There must be an approval process to conduct research in aboriginal communities. A process of free and prior consent is needed from aboriginal political leaders, from the researcher’s university and the community ethics review process. Researchers and participants must take responsibility for working together to determine if there is conflict of interest.

Article 2
Research must be collaborative and ongoing. There must be a sharing of knowledge and partnership must be valued.

Article 3
Partnership must be developed on equal ground to ensure that research is accurate. The benefit from information collected must be relayed to the community. All research partners must participate in the interpretation and/or review of conclusions drawn from research to ensure accuracy and sensitivity of interpretation.

Article 4
Contributors from the community of research information must be given credit and publications must recognize such contributions.

Article 5
Individuals cannot solely represent the community. Any sharing of information must be done so after consultation with the community.

Article 6
Research must be conducted only with the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge. The protection and sharing of Indigenous knowledge with each community and appropriate Elders is the responsibility of the researcher.

Article 7
Research collected must benefit both the community and researchers. Benefit sharing is to be interpreted from local community perspectives.
Article 8
There must be agreement on how knowledge, practices and traditions are to be used and disseminated. Agreement must be reached on how ownership of collected information is determined.

Article 9
There is need for proper education and training of Aboriginal peoples and communities who are involved in the research.

Article 10
Researchers are accountable for research and how it is presented. This means having respect for the temporal dimension (past and future generations) and a sacred sense of accountability (the Creator).

Article 11
Co-ownership of data collected and of publications should be agreed upon and copyright shared. Consent from both parties is required if secondary use of data is requested.

Article 12
Biological samples are ‘on loan’ to the researcher and cannot be transferred to a third party without consent. The research agreement must include conditions of collection, storage, plans for governance and for requests to withdraw, return or dispose of samples must be accommodated.

Article 13
Research partners shall provide information regarding anonymity or confidentiality and if not possible to inform participants that it is not possible.

Article 14
Researchers must fully inform the community about the nature of the research. Participants must know the consequences to remain involved and their rights to withdraw consent or to end their participation in the research.

Article 15
Relevant communities and individuals should be involved in all stages of the research process. They should be informed, prior to research commencement, of the aim and objectives of processes, outcomes and involvement.

Article 16
Language and communication of results must be appropriate. A formal research agreement must be established in the early phase of the relationship.
REFERENCES


