

## The blending of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous knowledge as applied to tourism development and recovery.

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# **The blending of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous knowledge as applied to tourism development and recovery.**

## **Introduction**

This research examines the role played by Indigenous knowledge in destination tourism planning. My interest and efforts are focused on the supply side of the tourism industry and how it might emerge from the recent pandemic with new insights and creative methods to not only overcome the unprecedented challenges brought on by Covid-19, but to build capacity and strengthen the sector in the longer term. In addition to industry insights, enhancing the understanding of the Indigenous vision of sustainability and how it might be applied to tourism development, this work adds to a body of research which is underrepresented in the tourism discipline currently.

Exploring the role of Indigenous knowledge in multiple jurisdictions allows for a broad world view, enhanced understanding of, or barriers to, Indigenous inclusion in tourism decision-making.

Indigenous voices are critical to tourism development in the post-Covid planning context if Indigenous aspirations for community development are to be realized (Hutchison, Movono and Scheyvens 2021). While tourism can provide a pathway to economic growth for Indigenous communities, the exploration of Indigenous knowledge systems and wider Indigenous-informed approaches can positively contribute to transforming business, health, and education for a more positive global society (Carr 2020). Whether it be for the advancement of Indigenous peoples or collaboration with established western approaches, the benefits of Indigenous inclusion could be transformational for the tourism industry on its post-pandemic journey.

As planners attempt to align resources to meet tourism demand, the future is difficult to map. What will the tourism landscape, and indeed the world, look like after the pandemic (Lew and Cheer 2020)? A qualitative approach to gain a deeper understanding of how Indigenous voices can be heard and how a collaborative framework might be built to propel the tourism industry forward for all stakeholder constitutes timely research. This can also be the beginning of further study to lay the foundation of what equitable research and industry collaborations might look like in the future (Radcliffe 2022).

## **Literature Review**

While there has been some work published on Covid-19 impacts that supply and destination management organizations and policymakers are experiencing through the three stages of the pandemic – response, recovery, and reset - there is a gap in the current literature addressing supply-side responses (Sigala 2020). The Coronavirus pandemic has created an opportunity for a transformative Indigenous development approach to tourism (Hutchison, Movono & Scheyvens 2021). This work adds to the existing body of tourism research on destination resiliency and recovery and addresses the gap of research related to Indigenous perspectives in tourism planning.

Both academic and industry sources were explored, seeking examples of progress and/or barriers for Indigenous peoples gaining leadership roles in tourism destination strategy development and decision making.

On Cape Breton Island-Unama'ki, Eastern Canada, an exciting new concept emerged approximately ten years ago which is based on a collaborative perspective. Two-eyed seeing is a term coined by Mi'kmaw elder Albert Marshall to refer to seeing the strengths of Indigenous ways with one eye, and simultaneously seeing the strengths of Western ways with the other eye (Bartlett et al 2012). The two-eyed seeing expression has been used in research not only with Indigenous people, but widespread applications can be found in policy and procedures related to wildlife health and management, medicine, education, and diverse other areas (Matthews 2021).

In Hawaii, for the first time, the 12-member board of directors of the Hawaii Tourism Authority is majority-led by Native Hawaiians (Ekstein and Murphy 2022). This is important as the Indigenous view on tourism development differs from that of non-native Hawaiians. The development and execution of new tourism strategies are a step forward for the destination and for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders.

Australia has a Reconciliation Action Plan (Reconciliation.org.au) which utilizes and promotes the following Acknowledgement of Country:

*Reconciliation Australia acknowledges and pays respect to the past, present and future Traditional Custodians and Elders of this nation and the continuation of cultural, spiritual and education practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.*

Such templates are found in Canada, the USA, and New Zealand, and are considered better than no recognition at all, but more can be done to demonstrate respect and to address colonialism's history of oppression of Indigenous people. While Reconciliation Action Plans in Australia have been working collectively for more than twenty years on education, research, policy, and community projects focused on building trust between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, Canada is just beginning facing the brutality of its colonial past.

Recognition of past wrongs is an important first step in moving forward (Canada.gc.ca 2021). Land acknowledgements for example, are increasingly applied in research, presentations, job interviews, academic syllabi, etc. While some authors have argued that such simplistic land recognition is insincere and moral exhibitionism (Wood 2021 and Necefer 2021), others consider it is an important sign of respect for Indigenous people.

There is some research available on applying traditional oral teachings to modern day circumstances for use in planning and problem solving (University of British Columbia 2021) and (Ermine 2006) but these are not specifically focused on tourism. Current academic research approaches are based in Euro-Western thoughts and ideals and therefore exclude Indigenous knowledge-based systems (Chilisa 2019). Indigenous communities and federal funding agencies in Canada have developed policy for ethical research with Indigenous Peoples (Drawson et al 2017).

## **Methodology**

As a non-Indigenous researcher, it is important to recognize and respect the Canadian government's commitment to reconciliation through the championing of Indigenous leadership, self-determination, and capacity in research (Indigenous Research Strategic Plan 2019-2022). Lavallée (2009) described an Indigenous research framework as a process of decolonizing the academy by incorporating Indigenous knowledge into the research rather than relying on Western theories.

Consciously framing research as a non-Indigenous person, this work is a qualitative approach to seeking a better understanding of the role played by Indigenous knowledge in destination tourism planning. Research consisted of an external review and analysis of existing data from online academic and industry articles, both journal and media, related to tourism planning. This approach was chosen to best identify examples of inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and engagement in tourism planning, policy, development, and recovery. Barriers to such inclusion were also noted. Two months was allocated for data collection with one month for analysis and writing.

Data collected identified global examples of Indigenous restorative actions which are different than inclusion in decision making. Media scans and subsequent document analysis included, but was not limited to, tourism destinations across Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. There are other jurisdictions which may warrant study such as Mexico, South America, and Africa, however the decision was made to limit the scope to these countries due to the time constraints of this research.

It is a necessity to learn from Indigenous knowledge without misappropriation. Scholars have studied cultural misappropriation prevalent in the tourism and sport sectors for years such as inappropriately using Indigenous symbols on logos, art, and crafts. The difference between appropriation and appreciation of Indigenous culture is that the former is "theft based on power and privilege," whereas the latter is "engagement based on responsibility and ethics" (Niigaan S 2017).

Building an effective research methodology bridging these two ways of knowing (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) is essential, whether the approach is to secondary or primary data collection. In this case, the author was careful to collect data from Indigenous sources as well as non-Indigenous sources to ensure well-rounded and accurate conclusions.

## **Results**

This research delivers both a theoretical contribution to existing literature on tourism planning as well as a practical contribution to rebuilding tourism on more equitable grounds in post-pandemic recovery strategies.

Specific findings include:

1. Examples of collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals, groups, organizations, and communities exist but are not abundant or standard operating procedure in tourism destination planning across the jurisdictions studied (Canada, USA, New Zealand, and Australia)

2. The Two-eyed Seeing methodology offers a proven approach to planning which could see an integration of theory and practice for tourism as it has been successful in other industries/disciplines.
3. The necessity for creative post-pandemic recovery strategies present an opportunity to build a workable framework to reconcile Indigenous and non-Indigenous approaches to tourism planning.

There may be a hesitancy to apply Indigenous knowledge to current tourism industry policy and development strategies as it is challenging to find a way of bringing together Indigenous ways of knowing and Western ways of conducting research, specifically qualitative inquiry (Lavallée 2009). A dichotomy exists between two very different peoples with different world views, especially when one group has played a dominant role over the other (Clarkson et al 1992).

By studying both Indigenous and non-Indigenous tourism decision-makers and critically analyzing their distinct approaches to tourism planning, a shared learning approach to tourism development can be considered.

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

Studying how destinations include or ignore Indigenous perspectives is valuable for future scholars and industry practitioners alike. There is currently a gap in the research related to the role of Indigenous perspectives in the tourism industry. For tourism destinations, Indigenous knowledge inclusion in the decision-making process holds many benefits. Destination management and marketing organizations are developing authentic historical and cultural visitor experiences and marketing, while ensuring that cultural exploitation does not take place. For Indigenous communities, the benefits of inclusion could be of economic, social, and cultural value.

Future research is encouraged that would enhance a more in-depth understanding of the complex dynamic between Indigenous and non-Indigenous decision-making. The results could be applied to address established colonial research norms as well as foster relationships with tourism stakeholders for mutual benefit as every navigates the new normal of tourism post-pandemic.

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