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The Case of the Cree Village Ecolodge in Moose Factory,Ontario

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Résumé de l'article

To move towards sustainability, tourism must contribute to the empowerment of local communities. This can be achieved through community participation in decision-making where essential information is gained, with the early stages of empowerment allowing the community to determine their own development (Cole, 2006). Community capacity building ensures the benefit of tourism to the local community by developing skills and entrepreneurial spirit to become part of the tourism industry, which will lead to the reduction of negative impacts. This article focuses on the community of Moose Factory that used a community based approach to create one of the world's top ecolodges. It was collaboratively developed in an attempt to provide economic, social and cultural livelihoods. Strategies used to develop and involve the community will be discussed.

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Putting Community Based Tourism into Practice
The Case of the Cree Village Ecolodge in Moose Factory, Ontario

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ABSTRACT : To move towards sustainability, tourism must contribute to the empowerment of local communities. This can be achieved through community participation in decision-making where essential information is gained, with the early stages of empowerment allowing the community to determine their own development (Cole, 2006). Community capacity building ensures the benefit of tourism to the local community by developing skills and entrepreneurial spirit to become part of the tourism industry, which will lead to the reduction of negative impacts. This article focuses on the community of Moose Factory that used a community based approach to create one of the world's top ecolodges. It was collaboratively developed in an attempt to provide economic, social and cultural livelihoods. Strategies used to develop and involve the community will be discussed.

Keywords : community based tourism, Aboriginal, indigenous, integration, empowerment.

In an attempt to address impacts resulting from traditional mass tourism development, alternative forms of tourism have evolved. Alternative forms of tourism such as Aboriginal ecotourism are generally smaller in scale and strive for sustainability, not only in the tourism industry itself, but also in the overall socio-economic and ecological environments of host communities. Aboriginal ecotourism is commonly characterized as having direct involvement of Aboriginal people, either through Aboriginal control of the tourism product and/or having Aboriginally based tourism products (Hinch and Butler, 2007; Notzke, 2004). Key features include: a strong connection to Aboriginal culture; tourism products owned and operated by Aboriginals; tourism products based on Aboriginal culture, environments, and traditional knowledge; and tourism controlled (developed, owned, and operated) by Aboriginal people (Zeppel, 2006). Scheyvens (1999) supports that Aboriginal ecotourism development is centered on resource conservation and empowerment of local people, by receipt of direct benefits and having control over development and management. This type of tourism builds on a community's capacity and pride to manage their own economy and create a workforce and a community that is skilled and self-sufficient.

Tourism has been used as a form of participatory, community-based (or driven) development in Aboriginal communities as it has the potential to address many of the economic, social, cultural and environmental challenges these communities face (Colton and Whitney-Squire, 2010; Graci, 2010; Hinch and Butler, 2007; Zeppel, 2006; Colton, 2005; Zeppel, 2003; McGinley, 2003; Altman and Finlayson, 1993). Benefits result from improved local economic wealth and an increased community capacity, enabling community development and empowerment and an improved sense of responsibility, as government reliance is reduced. Specific benefits include preservation of natural and cultural heritage, increased education, training and capabilities in business development and tourism, increased employment, economic diversification, improved infrastructure, enhanced environmental integrity, sharing of Aboriginal culture, diminishment of existing social problems and allowance of traditional ways of living off of the land in a sustainable way. Ecotourism development that is community driven is necessary, as tourism that is not planned in this fashion can result in negative impacts such as environmental degradation, and loss of identity and authenticity. The necessity for community involvement in tourism is widely reported in literature (Telfer, 2002;

Hardy and Beeton, 2001; Bramwell and Sharman, 1999; Sheyvens, 1999; Joppe, 1996; Simmons, 1994; Jamal and Getz, 1995; Murphy, 1985).

In order for community based tourism to be successful it has to increase community capacity. Labonte and Laverack (2001:114) explain capacity building as the increase in community groups' abilities to define, assess, analyze and act on concerns of importance to their members. It is based on the creation of partnerships, collaborations, and linkages; mobilization and communication within the community; development of vision, mission, and political will of the community; and the use of systems, organization, knowledge/skills, connectedness, and resources of the community. Community capacity improves stakeholder participation; increases problem assessment capacities; develops local leadership; builds empowering organizational structures; improves resource mobilization; strengthens links to other organizations and people; enhances stakeholder ability to question circumstance; increases stakeholder control over program management; and creates an equitable relationship with outside agents (Gibson *et al.,* 2002:489).

This is especially necessary for Aboriginal communities due to the sensitive nature of the communities. However, this may also hinder the implementation of this form of tourism. Aboriginal communities have been isolated and historically have not been granted the power of decision-making in the broader context. In Canada, successful community based tourism in Aboriginal communities is not the norm and whereas the benefits are great is a difficult to implement due to the lack of support from outside agencies. Support would include assistance in the development of business plans, infrastructure, and funds. For benefits to be realized, impacts mitigated and development to occur, Aboriginals need not only participate in the entire tourism lifecycle, they must control decision-making. Studies have examined the issue of community participation and control in indigenous tourism development (Colton and Whitney-Squire, 2010; Graci, 2010; Hipwell, 2007; Colton, 2005; Salole, 2007; Zeppel, 2003; 2007; Altman, 2003; Notzke, 1999; Altman and Finlayson, 1993). Altman (2003) explains that increasing Aboriginal control over tourism ventures is a new initiative in Canada and worldwide. The importance of Aboriginal control is not only limited to tourism development, but is reflected in economic development preferences as a whole. In his discussion on Aboriginal economic development in Canada, Anderson (1999) asserts that the Aboriginal approach to economic development is predominately collective, yet centered on individual nations' or communities' traditional lands, identities and desires for self-governance. Aboriginals desire economic systems that will improve socioeconomic circumstances, build economic self-reliance, support self-governance and trust and preserve and strengthen traditional aspects of their societies (Anderson, 1999; Elias, 1995). Although Aboriginal control is essential, these communities acknowledge that to succeed their economies must fit within national and global economic systems. This will make these small-scale enterprises appeal to a global market (Anderson, 1999). They also acknowledge that economic development follows business

development and that it is necessary to promote harmonization and partnerships amongst groups and individuals both within and outside Aboriginal communities to achieve economic self-sufficiency (Anderson, 1999). Tourism may provide an opportunity for communities that otherwise may have limited options for economic development (Benson and Clifton, 2004).

Despite these benefits, Aboriginal ecotourism development in Canada falls short of its potential and is vaguely regarded in the tourism industry, by governments and Aboriginal communities (Graci, 2010; Notzke, 2004). There are relatively few market-ready products in the Aboriginal tourism sector, particularly near gateway cities and major tourism routes. Many businesses do not have sufficient tourism market awareness, business skills, product development and marketing expertise to successfully compete (Industry Canada, 2012). Ontario's Aboriginal ecotourism sector is currently experiencing some growth, yet developments are limited to few communities, and are often based on eco-lodges, cultural camps and tours for wildlife viewing and canoeing (Graci, 2010).

This trend of underdevelopment is thought to result from a number of challenges that are immanent to Aboriginal ecotourism development. Studies have identified challenges related to business aspects of development, economic dimensions, institutional factors, and sociocultural challenges (Colton and Whitney-Squire, 2010; Graci, 2010; Hinch and Butler, 2007; Hipwell, 2007; Zeppel, 2006; 2003; Notzke, 2004; 1999; Altman and Finlayson, 1999). Graci (2010) identified in an exploratory study with key experts in Aboriginal tourism development that a lack of clear understanding and definition of ecotourism; inadequate resources including funding, expertise and support; lack of business and tourism training and education; poor product development and marketing; resistance to sharing culture; and bureaucracies within the community and with investors and partners including requirements for Aboriginal ownership and difficult funding processes are affecting this form of development. Barriers such as a lack of trust, corruption, and primary motivations such as self-interest may also hinder the success of development, but with an involved community, partnerships and support from outside agencies and leadership this may be overcome (Graci and Dodds, 2010). Despite these barriers however, there is the potential to develop a community based tourism product that strengthens the community's livelihood. The Cree Village Ecolodge in Moose Factory, Ontario is an exemplary example of how community capacity development can lead to a successful tourism product.

Research setting
The Cree Village Ecolodge, Moose Factory, Ontario
The Cree Village Ecolodge, on Moose Factory Island in Northern Ontario, Canada, is an example of community based tourism that has worked to create sustainable livelihoods through capacity and skills development in the community (see figure 1). The Mo'Creebec Aboriginal tribe decided to invest community funds and open the Cree Village Eco-lodge in 2000. The ecolodge has served as a means of bringing
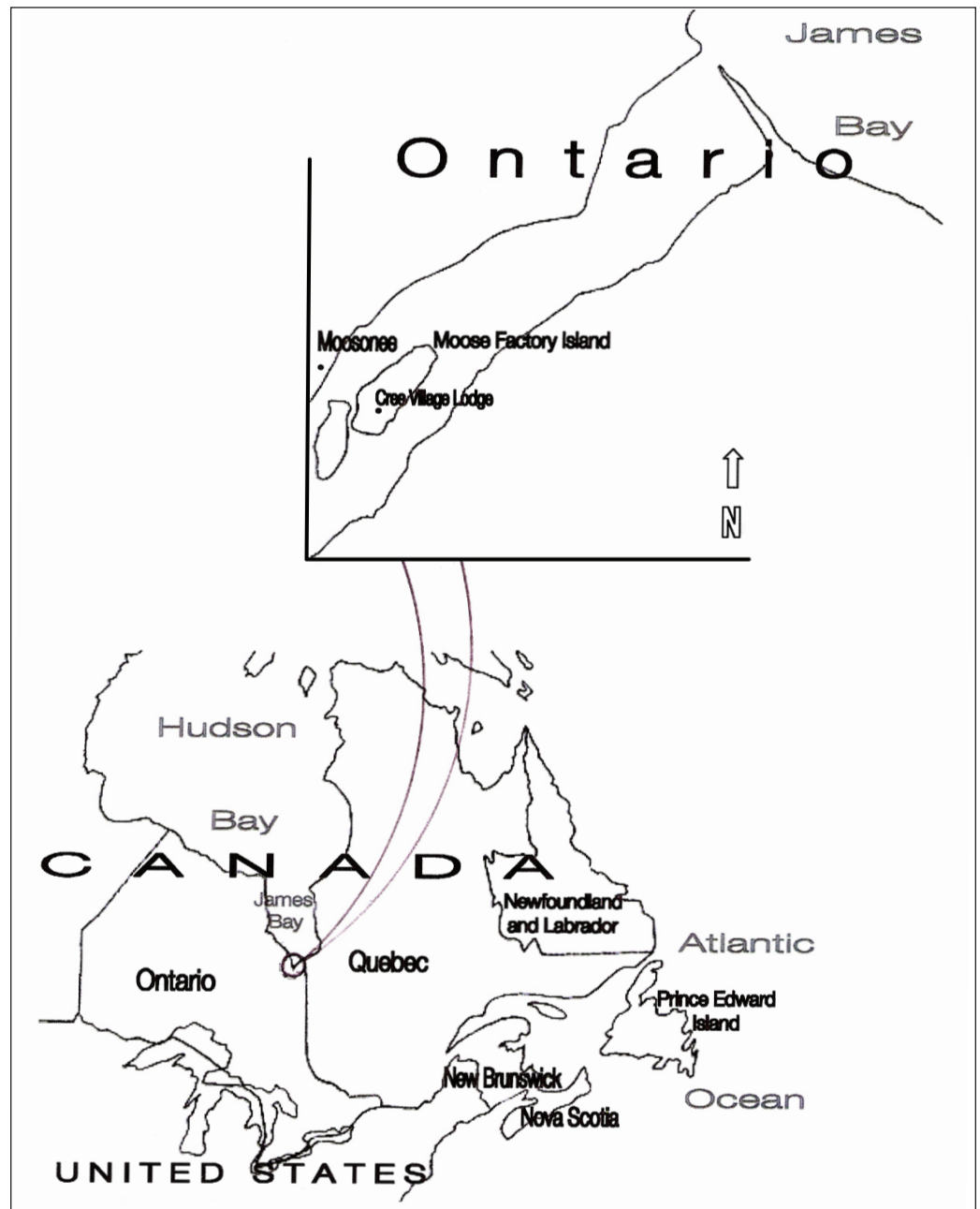
Figure 1 :
The Moose Factory Island,
in Northern Ontario (Canada)
(source : Graci and Dodds (2010)).

tourists to the community, which has created a tourism-based economy for an otherwise economically weak island. It has also led to the employment of several Cree peoples and serves as a place for social gatherings on the island. In addition, a community that has been poor and lost much of its culture in the past, has through tourism, revisited its ideologies regarding land and Aboriginal culture and has integrated these values, shifting from an otherwise culturally and economically impoverished community to a success story.

The Cree Village ecolodge is a 20 room lodge that is considered to be the most environmentally friendly in Canada (Cree Village Ecolodge 2012). In order to design and construct the lodge, the community was consulted to ensure that Mo'Creebec values were reflected in the built product. The lodge is run as a not-for-profit organization with all proceeds either invested back into the lodge or re-invested n the community. The facility was designed by the Mo'Creebec people as a means of seeking local development in a way that meshes with their identifies and beliefs. The lodge uses materials that have minimal environmental impact such as native wood, natural materials and low emission paint; uses low maintenance appliances and mechanical systems and environmentally benign products such as carpeting made from wool, organic mattresses and bedding from organic cotton. The food served

in the lodge consists mainly of traditional foods prepared in traditional ways such as caribou and trout and wild rice hand picked by First Nations communities (Cree Village Ecolodge 2012; Kapashesit, 2010; Graci and Dodds, 2010).

Methodology

A case study approach was undertaken for this study that consisted of an in-depth investigation of the issues surrounding tourism development in Moose Factory, Ontario. This research has been conducted as part of a larger study that has that included interviews with key informants worldwide, an examination of best practice case studies in Ontario, Australia and Peru and a study to determine the potential market for Aboriginal ecotourism in Ontario. A literature review of Aboriginal ecotourism and an in-depth investigation of literature specific to the Cree Village Ecolodge were examined in addition to an interview with Chief Randy Kapashesit of the Mo'Creebec in 2010.

Using a snowball sampling method, eighteen semi-structured key informant interviews were conducted with various stakeholders from January to May 2008. The key informants included academicians, Aboriginal Chiefs, representatives of provincial and federal government agencies, Aboriginal associations and tourism operators. The interviews collected perceptions of the present state and benefits and barriers to Aboriginal ecotourism in Ontario.

Findings

This case study illustrates that in order for community based tourism to be successful it needs to incorporate six key attributes of capacity building. These attributes have been extrapolated through the analysis of the literature and interviews. The six key attributes are ownership, community integration, building pride for cultural heritage and environmental preservation, community empowerment and partnerships.

Ownership

Ownership of the tourism product is necessary for a successful community based tourism product. The Mo'Creebec Aboriginal tribe decided to invest community funds into a fully owned and operated operation. They decided to take the social, environmental and economic issues facing their peoples into their own hands and build and invest in Cree businesses. They identified that in order to break the poverty cycle that was riddling their community, it was best to invest in a Cree economy and promote individual and collective business opportunities that support the values of Cree people. The purpose was to create a sustainable form of economic livelihood to help the community be self-sufficient and create jobs for the current and future members of the community. The primary goal was to initiate community economic development projects that build assets for the organization, contribute to the economy and provide employment to the local labour force. The Mo'Creebec also sought to address ongoing basic needs such as education and health care. In order to do this, the Mo'Creebec Council identified that an indigenous owned ecolodge that promotes environment and culture will benefit the community on the island as a whole

by stimulating the economy. All profits from the ecolodge are put back into the community for various developments.

Community Integration

The community based tourism product also needs to be fully integrated into the community. This enables the community to feel joint ownership of the space and use it for their own purposes, which also brings authenticity to the tourism product.

The ecolodge provides a very important social space to the community, as there are currently not many places on Moose Factory Island that the community can congregate. The architects consulted and worked with all members of the community to ensure authentic design and construction that combined Cree values with a building that worked well in the sub Arctic. This led to a space that is welcomed by the community. Despite the fact that some members of the community are still not comfortable with the presence of tourists, it has enabled the sharing of their culture and the remembering of traditions that were long since buried. The lodge also serves an important social function, as it is now the meeting place for social activities on the island. It was designed to include a Shabatwon or Great Hall to reflect the culture of the tribe. The ecolodge also provides a safe space for the community and is available for families in crisis. It provides support through donations such as meals to families during funerals and space for meetings or events that are needed by the community.

Building Pride for Cultural Heritage and Environmental Preservation

In many communities, and especially indigenous ones, the traditional knowledge and values related to their culture and environmental learnings have been lost.

The Mo'Creebec have traditionally been a nomadic people and have moved from place to place depending on the seasons and by needs. Many of the Mo'Creebec have traditionally been living in substandard living conditions such as tents and have recently in the last few decades moved into more permanent dwellings. As Aboriginal communities in Ontario (and many other countries) have not been treated fairly in the past and often put on reserves and had their livelihoods restricted, this has resulted in a community riddled with drug, alcohol, sexual abuse and loss of cultural traditions (Graci and Dodds, 2010). The Cree tribe on Moose Factory Island was placed in Christian schools in the last century, which resulted in sexual abuse by the people who ran the schools and a loss of cultural traditions that define the livelihoods of the Aboriginal people. As many of the community have not retained or lost several of their traditions, to develop a tourism product based on these traditions was difficult. Many of the employees do not know how to answer some visitor questions regarding community culture, traditions or stories because they were told so often not to tell their stories or practice their traditions so they are currently afraid to answer people's questions (Kapashesit, 2010, personal communications). The ecolodge however has provided a sense of pride to the community, as they are able to participate in cultural events and receive education of their

cultural ways without shame. This has created pride in their culture as well led to the development of an ecolodge that was inline with the Mo'Creebec's values towards nature.

Community Empowerment

Community capacity building is about empowering the local community to make informed decisions and also recognizing that the community plays a role in the viability of the tourism product. Empowering the community leads to an increase in knowledge, skills and training; a reduced reliance of government assistance; the employment of local people and investing in the local community. At the Cree Village ecolodge, not only is it 100 percent owned by the community but it focuses on employing as many local people as possible, including training and education relating to hospitality. The lodge also uses supplies where possible from the local community and uses the local community to provide authentic Aboriginal experiences to tourists such as participating in a sweat lodge ceremony, winter camping or experiencing the traditional way of hunting or fishing. In the future, the lodge hopes to work more closely in providing skills and education to the community.

Partnerships

Despite requiring to be the decision makers and developers of this tourism product, the Mo'Creebec worked with outside consultants such as architects and government agencies. Collaborating with other tourism organizations especially when it comes to the promotion and marketing of the destination, has greatly benefited the Moose Factory Ecolodge. The Moose Factory ecolodge has been named one of Canada's 28 significant Aboriginal experiences within Canada and is promoted as Canada's friendliest ecolodge (Canadian Tourism Commission, 2009). This creates knowledge and awareness amongst national and international tourists and increases the visitation to the lodge, ensuring its economic success.

These six attributes have contributed to the successful development of a community based tourism product that is both ecologically sound and socially rewarding.

Discussion and conclusion

A true partnership between the producer (the environment, the local culture and the people), the supplier (the tourism industry) and the consumer (the tourist) is critical for integrating community needs with the sustainable use of the environment while at the same time providing substantial profits to local people. Local control and ownership lead to empowerment that in turn has led to the conserving of natural and cultural heritage. In order for this success to be shared and modeled with other communities, multi-stakeholder partnerships must be developed between the best practice examples of community based tourism in association with governments, tour operators and non-governmental organizations. Communities should be given guidance on how to develop a successful community based operation. This can also lead to education and training in many aspects of the tourism development. Increased marketing efforts, and support and recognition from funding agencies could be provided

to assist in the development of these products. The sharing of best practices and opportunities for leadership would be the result of a multi-stakeholder partnership which would assist in barriers overcoming the many hurdles they face when it comes to community based tourism development.

Community based tourism development in essence, leads to the empowerment of local people which ultimately results in sustainable livelihoods. As in the case of the Cree Village ecolodge, the community benefited from an increase in economic development in an otherwise impoverished area. It reduced its reliance on government assistance by becoming self sustaining and developing an ability to fund other community projects through this venture. It led to the preservation of cultural, heritage and the natural environment through creating a pride and acceptance in the Mo'Creebec culture and encouragement to embrace their cultural heritage and environmental values. It also increased community empowerment by providing employment, education, knowledge, skills and training. This case is innovative in its approach and can be modeled by other communities for successful tourism developments. ∎

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Appel à textes

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