INDIGENOUS TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARCTIC

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Abstract: This paper explores current trends in indigenous (aboriginal) tourism development in Canada’s western Arctic region. Its operational environment is characterized by the presence of mixed local community economies and a co-management framework for lands and resources. In the North, aboriginal tourism is a resource-based industry, traditionally in the form of big game hunting, and in a more modern context, evolving into ecotourism and cultural or ethnic tourism. Some indigenous people are exploring innovative ways to harness tourism to support the traditional elements of their land-based economy, rather than being consumed by the industry. The “authenticity” of this tourism experience represents a major asset as well as a significant management challenge. Keywords: ecotourism, ethnic tourism, mixed economies, northern development.

INTRODUCTION

The area under investigation roughly coincides with the Western Arctic Tourism Zone and the claims settlement areas of the Inuvialuit (Eskimos/Inuit of Canada’s western Arctic) and Gwich’in (Athapaskan Indians). It is an area of great scenic beauty and diversity, encompassing such diverse features as the immense delta of the Mackenzie River, the spectacular Richardson Mountains, and endless tundra. It is home to virtually all species of marine and terrestrial arctic wildlife, including the world’s largest concentration of muskoxen on Banks Island, the Porcupine and Bluenose caribou herds, and healthy populations of polar bear and tundra grizzly.

Nature and culture set the region apart from the central and eastern

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Arctic. It is one of the few areas on the continent which has remained unglaciated for over 100,000 years, resulting in unique landscapes and lifeforms. With the Mackenzie River, the treeline almost reaches the Arctic Ocean, giving rise to a unique cultural ecology, where two indigenous peoples—the Inuvialuit of the Arctic coast and the Gwich’in of the northern forests—have traditionally shared the resources and space of the Mackenzie Delta. The third element of today’s cultural and ethnic mosaic, the Europeans, entered the stage in the 19th century with the establishment of the whaling industry along the coast and the fur trade inland, both of which have left their mark on the people and the land. Furthermore, the western Arctic is distinguished by the fact that its northern part looks back on a decade of land claim settlement implementation, the Inuvialuit Final Agreement (IFA) of 1984 (Figure 1), whereas the Gwich’in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement to the south was signed in 1992. The land is thus subject to innovative resource co-management regimes, which in the Inuvialuit case, has somewhat matured over a decade, whereas the Gwich’in regime is just being established. Not surprisingly, this has implications for the tourism industry.

The western Arctic is the only part of Canada’s Arctic accessible by road (namely, the famous Dempster Highway). This is another factor giving rise to a somewhat different pattern of tourism than in other parts of the Canadian Far North. The town of Inuvik constitutes “the end of the Dempster” and serves as the major transportation hub and staging point for the entire western Arctic region. While the Gwich’in communities Tet’it Zheh (Fort McPherson) and Tsiigehtchic (Arctic Red River) are located on the Dempster Highway, the tourism potential of the other five communities within the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (Aklavik, Tuktoyaktuk, Paulatuk, Holman, and Sachs Harbour) is at least partially determined by their distance from and connection with Inuvik. A scheduled air service to Holman only runs from Yellowknife. For the time being, Paulatuk has only limited tourism interest, due to its distance from markets, underdeveloped tourism infrastructure, and lack of tourism products. Of the remaining three communities, Tuktoyaktuk, Aklavik, and Sachs Harbour, the former easily receives the lion’s share of tourist visitation (over 80%).

According to the Northwest Territories Exit Survey (1995) from July–September 1994, over 6,300 people visited Inuvik (mostly via the Dempster Highway). This constitutes approximately 19% of visitors to the Northwest Territories (NWT), compared to almost 24,000 visitors or 70% to the South Mackenzie and over 3,500 travellers or 11% to the Eastern Arctic. In all three survey areas, domestic Canadian tourists accounted by far for the largest proportion of visitors—representing 76% and 88% in the South Mackenzie and Eastern Arctic, respectively. However, in the Dempster/Inuvik Area, the proportion of Canadians was much lower, at 54%, with 25% originating from the United States and 21% from outside North America (Government of the NWT 1995:5,19). The larger American proportion must be attributed to the proximity of Alaska. The 1992 Western Arctic Visitor Survey discusses the primary tourism interests: While wildlife viewing ranked first (as has been recorded in most of North America) with
99% of visitors choosing it as one of their main interests, “native culture” follows as a close second with 96% (Bufo Inc. 1992a, 1992b). Therefore, one may conclude that virtually all northern tourists would value an “aboriginal tourism experience”.

While aboriginal tourism in Canada’s western Arctic has not previously attracted the attention of researchers, there is an interesting though limited body of literature addressing tourism issues among northern aboriginal peoples in other northern areas, particularly the eastern Arctic. Smith’s (1989) seminal work on Eskimo in Northwest Alaska explores such key issues as tourism as an agent of culture change and the phenomenon of “marginal men” in tourism. This is rendered unique by the fact that Smith is in a position to report
Wolfe-Keddie’s (1993) study in Baffin and Keewatin deserves particular attention for her insightful comments on the costs of tourism to communities, and the dilemmas of involuntary hosts trying to cope with “dangerous children” (tourists). In their treatment of hospitality and tourism training and education in the NWT, Haywood, Reide and Wolfe (1993) provide some interesting comments on the community-based approach to tourism development. The reality of community-based development is also the focus of a case study from Pangnirtung (Reimer 1993; Reimer and Dialla 1992). This study illustrates that the NWT government’s approach to its own policy of “community-based” development does not imply community control, but merely involvement. In Pangnirtung, the major accomplishment of the approach has been the empowerment of the local community to create its own unique mix of formal and non-formal cash-related activities in tourism, which best meets the needs of the local families and the community as a whole. This study also reveals cultural conflicts as people struggle over whether or not to act competitively. The sociocultural, economic, and environmental dimensions of tourism is also explored in Hinch’s (1995) comprehensive treatment of aboriginal people in the NWT’s tourism economy. He highlights the importance of tourism education for both hosts and guests.

The McGill Tourism Research Group (MTRG) focuses its work on Baffin Island communities as exemplified by two excellent studies. Milne, Ward and Wenzel (1995) discuss the relationship between tourism and art in Cape Dorset. They also present an interesting overview of the changing face of tourism and the changing community economies in the Baffin region. Grekin and Milne (1996) explore various issues pertaining to sustainable tourism development in Pond Inlet. They note that literature in general has tended to downplay the role that local people can play in influencing tourism’s development path. These authors provide an interesting discussion of the delicate relationship between tourism and Inuit hunting activities, and the adoption of an “unwritten” policy to conceal hunting from tourists. They also perceive a desire on the part of both Inuit and visitors to see a greater degree of intercultural communication and interaction. Other important points addressed by their work include the necessity to educate visitors, missed economic opportunities for communities due to a lack of local communication and coordination between various community actors, and problems associated with marketing and packaging. Still there are a number of contributions in the literature addressing tourism implications of the relationship between protected areas and neighbouring communities. These include studies by Usher...
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(1993) on Polar Bear Park, Ontario, and Downie (1993) and Moss (1994) on Katannilik Territorial Park. The last contains an interesting discussion of the difference between adventure tourism and ecotourism—two categories that too often are lumped together—and the difference in their impact on local communities.

The purpose of this paper is a partial investigation of current issues in aboriginal tourism development in Canada’s western Arctic with particular focus on the Inuvialuit Settlement Region. Host and guest perspectives are explored. The former focuses on the system of checks and balances created by the claims settlement process, and its employment for the control of tourism development. The role of tourism in local mixed economies is also explored. Further, the study looks at the visitors’ perspective: their expectations, perceptions, and degree of satisfaction, as they are exposed to an “aboriginal tourism experience”. Particular attention is paid to the educational role of tourism.

The research methodology used in this study of the western Arctic consisted in participant observation, interviews, and questionnaires distributed to tourists. In July 1995 the author spent three weeks in Inuvik. It was this researcher’s third visit to the area after previous trips in 1988 and 1992, first as a “tourist” and then as a fieldworker. Participant observation was engaged in at Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk watching the mingling of tourists and local people, spending much time at the offices of the two local tour companies with both visitors and employees (and translating for European visitors), participating in selected tours, mingling with people at the local campground, visiting the Western Arctic Regional Visitor Center, and taking advantage of local B & B accommodation with a constant turnover of visitors. The author conducted semi-structured interviews with a large number of stakeholders in the regional tourism industry: local operators and guides, and numerous individuals representing tour companies, industry organizations, territorial and federal government departments, community organizations, and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region.

A questionnaire survey was conducted among tourists at Inuvik. For practical reasons (lack of appropriate sampling frame; the fact that the author was the only fieldworker) the sample was an opportunistic rather than random one. The survey, containing 30 questions, was completed by the respondents themselves. Various distribution methods were used. Part of the questionnaires were handed out by the author herself on selected tours, at the tour company offices, and on the campground. Others were left for pick-up by tourists at the campground office, with the tour companies and at local hotels. All questionnaires came with an explanatory letter and a self-addressed envelope to be returned to the author at the University of Lethbridge. Approximately 200 questionnaires were handed out or made available for pick-up. Seventy tourists responded by returning completed questionnaires. All of these respondents were thorough and went to great length in responding to open-ended questions, sharing their experiences and impressions.

The results of this survey appear valid (though not with a statistically known degree of confidence) for several reasons, despite the non-random nature of the sample. In terms of demographics and
general socioeconomic characteristics, the sample shares most features that have previously been reported by other studies conducted by or on behalf of the government of the NWT. Furthermore, the evaluation of the mostly qualitative data is supplemented by extensive ethnographic observation and a thorough knowledge of the context by the researcher.

ABORIGINAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Canada’s far northern regions are geographically peripheral and economically disadvantaged in comparison to the south, home to the majority of the country’s population and its economic engine. Until the 70s, the North was viewed and treated as a hinterland—economically, culturally, and politically. The fact that a large percentage of Canadian northerners is aboriginal, namely 61% in the NWT, and 15% in the Yukon, puts this situation into a particularly sharp focus. For over a century, the fate of Canada’s northern peoples was dictated by perceptions and aspirations of southerners. “The True North strong and free” (as evoked by Canada’s national anthem) has always exerted a powerful influence on the country’s sense of national identity, but was, until recently, denied the assertion of its own identity and control over its destiny. In the last two decades this has changed. The 70s ushered in a new era for Canada’s aboriginal peoples in general, and the North in particular. In recognition of the fact that northern aboriginal peoples never signed valid treaties with European powers, the Yukon and the Northwest Territories are today covered with comprehensive aboriginal claims and claim settlement agreements in various stages of implementation and negotiation. Comprehensive claim settlement agreements provide for land ownership, exclusive and shared rights and responsibilities with regard to natural resources, cash payments, and elements of self-government. Most importantly, they put in place innovative management regimes for lands and resources, which, for the first time, make allowance for northern realities and needs, rather than exclusively catering to a southern agenda.

The importance of these developments for the tourism industry cannot be overstated. Tourism is in the business of selling dreams; tourists strive to purchase experiences. Northerners are by now well aware of the southern mythology of the North: as a last frontier, or more recently, as a natural Eden, untouched by the hand of Man. For tourism to be sustainable, however, and beneficial for northern communities, what matters, is not southern imagery, but northern reality. The native people have the greatest stake in a tourism industry, which does not primarily cater to southern dreams but rather to northern life. Further, northern native people are the best mediators between southern visitors and their homeland—not a last frontier, not an untouched wilderness, but a homeland which has shaped and sustained their communities, their culture, and their economy. As such, for tourism to fit into this type of northern reality, two important frameworks must be borne in mind: the paradigm of economies and
A basic knowledge of how northern communities and economies function and a thorough understanding of the nature of socioeconomic change are indispensable for understanding the forces that shape tourism in the North, and for assessing its impact. Elias has tackled the complex task of constructing a detailed model of how northern communities work, in particular, northern economies. His work is based on decades of personal experience as well as on the collective knowledge contained in the primary literature—that is, empirical research data, collected by 133 authors in 74 communities representing 30 identified cultural populations in Canada, Alaska, and Greenland (Elias 1994:4). One important objective of this exercise was to offer planners and decision-makers a tool to determine where development initiatives may have beneficial or harmful effects, and how scarce development resources may be applied in an optimum manner. It is beyond the scope of this paper to even summarize his findings; only some of the more salient ideas with relevance for tourism can be presented here.

Northern communities are small, seldom numbering more than several hundred inhabitants. Their populations are predominantly aboriginal as well as young and fast growing. By national standards, they possess very modest physical infrastructures. They are geographically remote from non-aboriginal population centers; and they are located in relatively pristine natural environments. These communities feature “mixed economies” in which incomes are derived from a mix of domestic production, wage labor, transfers, and enterprise. Due to the high cost of living in the North, life would be problematic in many villages without income from domestic production—hunting, fishing, trapping, and gathering.

Although domestic production makes a very significant contribution to the local economy, little of this is in the form of cash. Because all needs cannot be satisfied through domestic production, it would be equally difficult to continue life in Northern villages without cash. Such incomes are earned through sale of labor and commodities, and enterprise. Of these, wage labor is most important, but rarely are there enough jobs for all people who want employment, and employment opportunities usually grow more slowly than the labor force. Because domestic production cannot provide for all needed goods and services, nor can employment, commodities and enterprise yield all needed cash, communities are sustained partially by transfers from the outside. In mixed economies, no one sector takes precedence over any other; the sectors are mutually supportive to the extent that if one sector fail, the entire economy would be in jeopardy (Elias 1995:8).

In northern mixed economies, households are the basic units of production, distribution, and consumption. They tend to be multi-generational, comprising members of extended families, although
related individuals are likely to dwell in several households. Northern community economies are structured by kin relations among members of different households. In any particular community, there may be considerable variation in how each household is involved in each sector of the mixed economy. Furthermore, the extent of a household’s involvement in a particular sector changes through time (Elias 1995). With regard to the important question, how tourism can be made to fit into this picture, one statement in particular needs to be reiterated:

In mixed economies, no one sector is more important than any other; the sectors are mutually supportive to the extent that should one sector fail, the entire economy would be in peril (Elias 1995:8)

For the longest time, the universal paradigm of social change has been the assumption that hunting, trapping, and fishing will be replaced by wage-labor and enterprise as the means of making a living, and that this process represents an inevitable and universal step in human progress. This way of thinking—dubbed the modernization/acculturation model by Elias and Weinstein (1992:5)—is still alive and well. On the other hand, findings in aboriginal communities across the North suggest that the combination of different sectors within the mixed economy constitutes a dynamic equilibrium which is as fragile as it is resilient. The subsistence/adaptation model of Elias and Weinstein assumes that land and resource use is a primary value for aboriginal societies. Culture and social structure are inextricably tied to the natural environment and based on hunting, trapping, fishing, and gathering. Critical elements of satisfaction and meaning in life, economic well-being, and recreational preferences are all derived from these land-based activities. Ideas of how life should be lived are fundamentally tied to being on the land, according to the same source. As a result, rather than eagerly forsaking the land for wage labor and enterprise, when given the opportunity, aboriginal northerners have devised flexible systems of managing lands, resources, time, and cash, engaging in both casual employment and resource harvesting. The result is the mixed economy.

Within this framework, domestic production continues to be viewed as the most reliable sector of people’s economy, and as the main source of cultural satisfaction and social prestige. Rather than detracting from this valuation, cash income adds to it. This income from various sources and the level of domestic production go hand in hand. Cash is used to supply households with consumer goods and services, and to underwrite the costs of domestic production. When cash is available, they will spend it on technology and transportation to reach distant harvesting sites more quickly, to enable them to produce most costly prestige resources (beluga, caribou), and to enhance their redistributive status within the community. Modern domestic production requires considerable amounts of cash to meet the costs of necessary equipment and operations. As a result, the level of domestic production a household can achieve depends mostly on its ability to meet these costs. Households and individuals with high incomes are frequently the most productive domestic producers in a community (Elias 1955:11). The importance of cash in northern economies is
likely to increase in the future. For this reason, most households, whether or not they are currently dedicated domestic producers, will welcome any initiative that increases access to cash. Despite this background, it is hardly surprising that there is much individual determination and collective political will to safeguard domestic production and its resources from trespass and competition of cash-producing activities, be they resource-based or not. This is achieved by the process of co-management of natural resources, which creates an operational environment with this priority in mind.

Co-Management of Natural Resources in the North

“Co-management” broadly refers to the sharing of power and responsibility between government and local resource users. It is achieved by various levels of integration of local and state level systems. It ranges from the mere tokenism of local participation in government research to local communities that retain substantial self-management power. Co-management regimes may concentrate on a particular species or include all renewable resources of an area. As a rule, these schemes result in the establishment of co-management institutions such as boards or committees with government and user-group membership. Co-management regimes by native and non-native parties for renewable resources are being established in all parts of Canada (and increasingly worldwide) under different circumstances and for different purposes. One of the most important vehicles for the establishment of co-management regimes is the settlement of comprehensive claims. Settling these usually involves exclusive or preferential harvesting rights for aboriginal people on Crown lands within their claimed territory and involvement by aboriginal people in the management of resources. The latter is accomplished by schemes that allocate control of resources among competing interests and facilitate the merging of local environmental and Western scientific knowledge.

The 1984 Western Arctic (Inuvialuit) Final Agreement engendered a complex co-management scheme, encompassing all aspects of natural resource management environmental impact assessment and review, and the management and establishment of new national parks. This agreement constitutes the settlement of the Inuvialuit comprehensive claim, based on traditional use and occupancy, to lands in the western Arctic. More than 3,500 Inuvialuit are represented under the Inuvialuit Final Agreement, the majority residents of the western Arctic and living in the six Inuvialuit communities of Inuvik, Aklavik, Tuktoyaktuk, Paulatuk, Sachs Harbour, and Holman. In settlement of their comprehensive claim, the Inuvialuit Final Agreement granted to the Inuvialuit specific rights, including title to lands in fee simple, US$31.5 million in cash, and rights related to participation in resource development, renewable resource harvesting, and management of renewable and non-renewable resources.

The goals of the Inuvialuit with regard to their comprehensive claim settlement, spelled out in Section 1 of the Inuvialuit Final
Agreement, are to preserve Inuvialuit cultural identity and values within a changing northern society; to enable Inuvialuit to be equal and meaningful participants in the northern and national economy and society; and to protect and preserve the Arctic wildlife, environment, and biological productivity (Government of Canada 1984:1). These goals can be summarized as cultural identity, integration, and conservation (Doubleday 1989:211). They may also be perceived as containing a dual mandate: development as well as conservation. This apparent dichotomy is mirrored in the two principal management structures created by the agreement (the Inuvialuit Game Council and the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation) and it is being addressed by five co-management institutions, the so-called Renewable Resources Committees (Notzke 1995:38). The resultant regime strives to provide for a regulatory environment that makes allowance for both traditional and innovative modes of resource utilization. It is a complex régime for any industry, including tourism, to operate in, as it endeavors to do justice to Inuvialuit society and economy, and to the nature of socioeconomic change and continuity, as the Inuvialuit perceive it.

The membership of the Western Arctic Tourism Association (WATA) reveals a considerable aboriginal presence in this industry. The organization counted 81 members, 36 of whom were aboriginal. The majority of the association’s directors were aboriginal. Inuvik’s two major tour companies, Arctic Nature Tours and Arctic Tour Company, are majority aboriginal-owned. With the exception of Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk, accommodation, too, is mainly in aboriginal hands: Most communities have co-op hotels, inns, or family-owned B&B establishments. Merely the retail tourism trade remains mostly under non-native control (interview with the WATA General Manager in July of 1995). Aboriginal tourism products include guided community tours, visits to fishing and hunting camps, homestay programs, fishing lodges, outfitting for big game hunting, and arts and crafts sales. Many of the non-consumptive visitor activities combine an experience of the Arctic or Subarctic ecosystem with varying degrees of cultural immersion, reflecting the growth of ecotourism in the region. As such, an investigation of aboriginal tourism development in the western Arctic requires attention to many different topics: the programs and management of the tour companies; the aboriginal perspective on protected areas and heritage sites; guiding and outfitting for big game hunting; tourism and the land and resource management régime; tourism and the land-based economy; and the visitor’s perspective on tourism. Only the last three of these six topics can be covered within the scope of this article, with the Inuvialuit as the main focus.

Tourism and the Land and Resource Management Régime

Tourism in the western Arctic operates within a unique management environment. In land claims settlement regions not only government regulations must be satisfied, when it comes to licensing and operation of tourism enterprises. In the case of the western Arctic
there are also numerous Inuvialuit and Gwich’in boards, committees, and community organizations which must be accommodated. These institutions are creations of the claims process and the operational expressions of the resultant co-management régime. For the Inuvialuit and Gwich’in such management environment can be empowering and constraining at the same time.

The Regional Tourism Manager for Economic Development and Tourism, Government of the Northwest Territories (NWT) believes that the license application and consultation process has become a major roadblock for many prospective tourism entrepreneurs or outfitters (personal communication). The Inuvialuit, with the maturing of their management régime after a decade of claim settlement implementation, have come to adopt a slightly more relaxed attitude and seek to streamline some of their procedures. The Gwich’in, on the other hand, are just in the process of establishing their management régime, and understandably are exercising their management and decision-making power more assiduously. While big game hunting, and guiding and outfitting activities associated with it, fall under the authority of the Government of the NWT Renewable Resources Department, other subsectors of the tourism industry are the jurisdictional responsibility of the Department of Economic Development and Tourism (and, where applicable, Parks Canada). The most important piece of legislation in this context is the “Travel and Tourism Act”, with its “Regulations for Outfitters and Tourist Establishments”. A need to revise this allegedly outdated piece of legislation is often expressed by the industry, but to date no action has been undertaken.

The Inuvik office of Economic Development & Tourism provides prospective applicants for a Tourist Outfitter’s license with an information package on the application process. An “Outfitter” is defined in the Travel and Tourism Act as follows:

Outfitter means any individual or corporate body who provides equipment to be used in connection with an outdoor recreational activity or provides guides or guiding services or both.

Part of the package is a licensing check-list of authorities that need to be consulted. They include, at the consultation process (land use) level such institutions as Town, Hamlet or Settlement Council, Gwich’in Tribal Council, Renewable Resource Council (Gwich’in Land), Inuvialuit Land Administration, Hunters’ and Trappers’ Committee (Inuvialuit Land), Community Corporation, Environmental Impact Screening Committee, Band Council, and Metis Association. Government Agencies on the check list include Department of Fisheries and Oceans (lake fish/bednight capacity), Canadian Coast Guard (proposed operation on coastal and inland waters), Department of Renewable Resources (advice on new developments), and Canadian Wildlife Service-Yellowknife (permits to enter migratory bird sanctuaries). Still other licensing requirements cover registration with Corporate Registries of the Department of Justice and registration with Workers’ Compensation Board of the NWT as well as Public Liability Insurance ($695,000 coverage).
The first part of this check list largely contains institutions created by the claim process. Most outfitters will be concerned either with the Inuvialuit Settlement Region or with Gwich'in lands, but there are land use overlaps, and some operators may want to travel in both areas. Tourism proposals—be it river travel, dogsledding, or a camp or lodge—within the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, including national and territorial parks, are all considered “developments” by the Environmental Impact Screening Committee (one of the five Inuvialuit Renewable Resource Committees). Therefore, a tourism proposal will be screened by the committee to determine any potential environmental impact the proposed activity may have. Since the screening process involves consultation with local community organizations, it take several weeks or even months. Upon completion it is referred to the licensing agencies (Economic Development and Tourism or Renewable Resources) for their approval, or sent for further environmental review and public hearings. Depending upon the complexity of the proposal, the latter process may again take several months. New applications must be submitted by license holders, if there is even a slight change in their proceedings, such as a new stopping point on the river or a new campsite. Until recently, even established tour operators with a track record in Ivavik National Park needed to go through the approval process on an annual basis, in order to run their Firth River rafting trips, which has caused them serious problems. Only lately this procedure has been replaced by a multi-year approval process.

For aspiring Inuvialuit entrepreneurs in the tourism sector, the application and approval process in individual cases may take in excess of one year, and a positive outcome is by no means guaranteed. Inuvialuit, who have worked “on the inside” of the system, do not perceive the process as excessively onerous, but concede that an “in-house educational process” may be useful (interview with the Inuvialuit Joint Secretariat, Inuvik in July 1995). Candidates who are less familiar with the requirements, may be deterred by the multiplicity of agencies, but also by the possibility of being turned down by their own communities. A problem that local aboriginal people find hard to deal with is the “personal nature” of their denial or approval within their community or claim area. It contrasts with the anonymous nature of government dealings and is much harder to accept and to cope with. A negative experience with non-native or external tourism operators may prompt a community to deny an opportunity to one of their own (interview with the Chairman of the Inuvik Hunters’ and Trappers’ Committee, Inuvik in July 1995). Furthermore, politics enter into the decision-making process.

On the other hand, it must be acknowledged, that community decision-makers may be faced with very difficult choices. One of the most sensitive issues concerns the admission of visitors into hunting and whaling camps. During the late 80s and early 90s, there were Inuvialuit individuals who firmly believed in the educational potential of “cultural immersion” tourism, in educating visitors about the realities of a land-based way of life. But in the wake of the demise of the sealing industry and the trapping controversy in the 80s, the com-
munities were extremely concerned about the “Greenpeace syndrome” and reluctant to make harvesting activities publicly accessible. But this concern also fostered a constructive reaction, namely the development of Tourism Guidelines for beluga-related tourism activities.

Tourism and the Land-Based Economy

Most of the measures to regulate and control tourism (and other activities) are designed to protect the natural resource base of the Inuvialuit Settlement Region and the integrity of Inuvialuit harvesting activities. It is the Inuvialuit vision that what the land provides will always remain central to Inuvialuit life, modern economic aspirations notwithstanding. For this reason, it is very important to examine the relationship between the Inuvialuit land-based economy and the tourism industry. In this context, for the Inuvialuit in embracing tourism, the challenge is twofold: to protect the integrity of their land-based economy and way of life from trespass and interference of the tourism industry; and to engage in tourism activities in a way which enables the industry to fit into, nurture, and benefit community mixed economies to an optimum degree.

The Inuvialuit have responded to challenge number one in a constructive way by their development of “Tourism Guidelines” for beluga-related activities. Considering the devastating impact the animal rights movement has had on northern aboriginal people’s lives and economies, the Inuvialuit are justified in being extremely wary of granting the public access to harvesting activities. During the summer tourism season, whaling is the harvesting activity, and consequently the communities’ greatest concern. The guidelines are designed to prevent physical interference with whaling as well as misrepresentation of the activity. The Beaufort Sea Beluga Management Plan of 1991 points out that whale hunting and tourism are not necessarily compatible activities (Fisheries Joint Management Committee 1991:16); thus, any encounter between the two requires sensitive management. The guidelines provide the Hunters’ and Trappers’ Committees of the harvesting communities (mostly Inuvik, Aklavik, and Tuktoyaktuk) with the authority to strictly control access and other activities in the harvesting zones, camps and vicinity thereof; and they clearly stipulate that subsistence hunting takes priority over any tourism activities.

The Hunters’ and Trappers’ Committees will designate areas that may be used for the purpose of whale watching within the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, but retain the right to impose every kind of limitations on these activities. As a condition for their license, tour operators visiting camps need written agreements with the committees and camp owners in question. No one is allowed to take photographs or video footage of harvesting or related activities without the explicit written consent of the committee(s), the camp owner and hunters involved in the hunt, or the Inuvialuit Game Council. Media involvement is even more strictly controlled. These are only some of the provisions that pertain to harvesters’ concerns in particular; others
address marine mammal harassment, artifact removal, garbage disposal, and aircraft restrictions.

The summer of 1995 was the first season the guidelines were in operation. There was only one operator who occasionally took visitors to his family’s whaling camp, but his trips were irregular and difficult to schedule. The implementation of the guidelines is likely to put people more at ease, since they specifically address harvesters’ concerns and give them an element of control. The number of hunters welcoming tourists into their camps will likely remain small, but among the Inuvialuit there are numerous strong believers in the educational function of tourism. These individuals feel that, wherever there is a willing host, tourism can go a long way in changing outsiders’ views of harvesting activities. However, an element of risk remains: “How do you control information, once you have given it?” (interview in Inuvik in July 1995). But with an increasing measure of control on the part of the harvesters and improving education of tourists, more aboriginal hosts may be willing to take this leap of faith. Another topic that many Inuvialuit feel tourists should be educated about, is the claims process.

Conversations with Inuvialuit hosts and southern guests leave little doubt that an “aboriginal tourism experience” is a very effective teacher about the northern way of life and everything it entails. The future of tourism, however, will at least in part be determined by how well it can be made to fit into this way of life. This is challenge number two. Some of the people who are making the richest contribution to a visitor’s northern experience are enabled to do so by the fact that they are not full-time tourism professionals, but are firmly rooted in a way of life that ties them to the land. The tourism part of their mixed economy provides the cash to supply households with consumer goods, and underwrites the cost of their domestic production. The local operators for Arctic Nature Tours in Tuktoyaktuk, a married couple, are an excellent example, of how this can be accomplished.

These tourist outfitters combine a land-based way of life with tourism and pursue both ecotourism and guiding and outfitting sport hunters. The husband has been involved in tourism for approximately nine years. During the summer of 1995, he was completing his certification process as a whitewater rafting guide. The couple are in the process of setting up their own tourism company, Ookpik Tours and Adventures, which is to combine adventure and ecotourism with big game hunt outfitting and guiding (Table 1). Presently all their non-sport hunting tourism is booked through Arctic Nature Tours in Inuvik; sport hunting clients are allocated by Beaufort Outfitting and Guiding Services, a community corporation. As the wife points out, in this manner they are able to spend almost ten months out on the land. The couple come across as genuinely enjoying what they are doing, and tourists respond to this attitude. They also report considerable interest in land-based tourism on the part of younger people, whenever they are looking for employees (interview with the operators in July 1995).

Another member of their family must be credited with starting tourism in Tuktoyaktuk as early as 1982. He was initially motivated
### Table 1. Seasonal Cycle of Community Residents Combining a Land-Based Way of Life with Tourism Activities

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>Sport hunt for caribou, fishing for subsistence and dogs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late October to December</td>
<td>Trapping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christmas break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January to February</td>
<td>Trapping, preparation for polar bear hunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March to April</td>
<td>Sport hunt for polar bear, muskox and barren ground grizzly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Traditional spring hunt for geese (subsistence only) and icefishing. James and Maureen plan to attract “spring tourists” for the Beluga Jamboree (a spring festival in April), with dogteam rides and visits to the pingos (local landforms)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>Tourists start arriving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 20 to July 23 (appr.)</td>
<td>River rafting trips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June to August</td>
<td>Whaling, community tours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

by witnessing “tourists wandering around the community with no one to educate them about Inuvialuit culture”. A chance encounter alerted him to the educational potential of tourism and awakened his idea of a “cultural immersion tour”. For almost a decade, and after considerable trailbreaking, he offered a tourism product—taking people out on the land, for trapping, caribou hunting, and whaling—which is no longer available. He feels that the visitors to his camp underwent a true educational experience, which in many cases changed their outlook on the hunting culture of the Inuvialuit. Due to a combination of factors, he saw himself compelled to shut down his business in 1992, but is still involved in tourism by working with the couple (interview notes in July 1995).

The tourism industry in this region is at a stage where it still is very “personality-dependent”. The large volume of visitors to Tuktoyaktuk —3,500 in 1994—is not primarily a result of Tuktoyaktuk’s relative proximity to Inuvik. Aklavik is even closer and receives under 100 visitors. It is conditioned by ground-operators like the above operators, and by the residence of the majority owners of Arctic Tour Company in the community. The latter are equally active in conducting local tours in Tuktoyaktuk, and are planning an expansion into the shoulder seasons, driving the iceroad, building igloos and the like. Despite the large volume of visitation, the community (with a population of approximately 1,000) has remained tolerant of tourism. This is likely due to the fact that most visits only last several hours, and visitor groups are almost always guided. But in some areas there are signs of strain. As one of the owners points out, visitors are particularly interested in sampling native food, which certainly could be capitalized upon. On the other hand, sharing traditional country food with tourists sometimes constitutes a severe strain on scarce resources, such
as berries, and tour companies have experienced difficulty securing such food in sufficient quantities (interview notes in July 1995).

Other Inuvialuit communities experience far fewer visitors, usually under 100 per year. In their 1993 study of Banks Island, Stephen, Gla Holt and Little (1993:23) estimate the number of annual pleasure visitors at 25–35 in the early 90s, and anticipate a slow rise due to a gradual increase in the non-consumptive tourists and a stable big game hunting market. These researchers report a positive attitude towards tourism among Sachs Harbour’s residents (population 133), who feel that they could comfortably handle about 200 tourists per year. While there are two licensed tourism outfitters in Sachs Harbour, no recent progress has been made in terms of product development and tourism organization at the community level. Economic Development and Tourism of the Government of the NWT is currently focusing its attention on Aklavik, where it perceives an increased community interest in tourism (interview notes in July 1995).

Visitors’ Perspective on Aboriginal Tourism

In the summer of 1995, the author conducted a survey among tourists in Inuvik, to gain an impression of their “aboriginal tourism experience”, and obtained 70 completed questionnaires. In terms of demographics and general socioeconomic characteristics, the sample shares many features that have previously been reported by other studies conducted by or on behalf of the Government of the NWT, such as the 1994 NWT Exit Survey (Government of the NWT 1995) or the 1992 Western Arctic Visitor Survey (Bufo Incorporated 1992a, 1992b). As is typical for northern tourists, a relatively large proportion (36%) was over 60 years old. Although other surveys also characterize tourists to this region as well-educated, this sample appears slightly skewed towards high educational achievement, since an amazing 41% report a graduate degree, and a further 28% post-secondary education. This can most likely be explained by a stronger interest in and more “sympathetic” disposition towards university-based research (a letter attached to the questionnaires identified this project as such) by those voluntary respondents who have had more exposure to it. Commensurate with other studies, most respondents appeared to be well off, with 24% reporting an annual income between $41,000 and $60,000, and 17% earning between $61,000 and $80,000. Over 60% were Canadian, some 25% American, and 15% came from other countries (such as Australia, Germany, Mexico, Japan, and Poland).

About 60% of the respondents had visited the Canadian North before, but only 11% knew Inuvik from a previous visit. Some 44% identified their visit as “autotouring” (although 56% had arrived in Inuvik by vehicle); 27% had come for “outdoor adventure”, 25% were visiting family, friends, or their travel was partly work-related; and 4% wanted to go fishing. Most of the visitors, 79% were travelling independently. Except for those who were visiting friends or family, most respondents spent very little time in Inuvik, most commonly
between one and four days. Of all respondents, 79% had visited Tuktoyaktuk, 4% had flown to Aklavik, and another 4% to Sachs Harbour. While all 56% who arrived in Inuvik by motor vehicle pass the Gwich’in communities Tsiigehtchic (Arctic Red River) and Fort McPherson, only 21% reported visiting the former and 39% the latter.

Statistics sometimes fail to do justice to the variety of the human element. There was the “stay at home Mom” from Alberta; the physical therapist from California, leading a Sierra Club trip; the college student from Calgary visiting her Inuvialuk boyfriend; two retired teachers from Virginia and New York State, having the time of their life; the professor from Poland; the German writer, driving his red van from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego; another professor from Japan; and the graduate student from Illinois, who was “loathe” to identify himself as a “tourist”. However, what united all these people was their great interest in aboriginal northerners and their lifestyle. Over 70% of the respondents claimed to be very interested in native people, 28% were interested, and only one respondent said that he was not particularly interested. For 16% of the respondents an encounter with northern native people constituted the most important part of their trip. When asked what they were particularly interested in regarding aboriginal people, by far the largest percentage, 77%, named people’s everyday life; arts and crafts were mentioned by 69%; traditional land-based activities by 50%; learning from native people about the environment by 47%; and country food by 44% (people were encouraged to name multiple items).

Almost all of the respondents reported an encounter with aboriginal people (94%), many of them encounters of an informal or privately arranged nature, but the majority took advantage of the two Inuvik tour companies. People reported a high degree of satisfaction: 94% claim to have enjoyed their experience very much, whereas the remainder found it “OK”; 17% had their expectations surpassed; 67% felt that their expectations had been fulfilled; and only 9% were disappointed (in 7% of the cases this question did not apply). Asked about the highlight of their experience, 54% considered it to be their “personal encounter with native people”; the next frequent response with 29% refers to their “native guide’s performance”, and 20% particularly enjoyed the country food.

The strong emphasis placed by visitors on their personal encounter with aboriginal people and on their native guide’s ability to communicate his/her culture to the tourist, is an extremely important point to note. It corresponds closely with the response given by most tourists, to what they were particularly interested in: 77% wanted to find out more about people’s everyday life. Learning about people’s daily lives from the people themselves seems to constitute an important measure of the quality of a visitor’s aboriginal tourism experience. This sounds very simple, but not quite so. Putting on a paid performance for a visiting public is much easier than sharing one’s life in a genuine manner. Many (though not all) tourists in the western Arctic may be given credit to be able to tell the difference. Among those who (in the questionnaire) claim to have enjoyed themselves “very much”, there actually is a wide spectrum of satisfaction, illus-
trating once again the importance of personalities and individuals at this stage of tourism development in the region. Depending on their community guide, people may proclaim that they had “the experience of a lifetime”, or that “it was nice”. Taking into account the importance of “word of mouth” advertising, this is not to be taken lightly. The following is just one example:

I enjoyed spending time with Maureen and James in their home, partaking of “lunch” with them. They shared their food, lifestyle, and culture with us. We learnt about the wonderful way they live on the land, preserving food, making clothing and yet live in town.

Having established that people report a high degree of satisfaction with their aboriginal tourism experience, it is equally important to investigate potential areas of complaint. Among the 70 respondents, 14 put forward complaints or suggestions for improvement. Six of those concern the two tour companies. Among the points raised were false advertising, inefficiency, disorganization, and poor salesmanship; as suggested in the following comments offered by different respondents:

Tour companies should be more honest in their advertising… Tour companies could try harder to fill tours… Both tour companies in Inuvik have advertising that misrepresents them. Although many tours are listed for both companies, they in fact only have 4 or 5 readily available when you arrive—and then you never know till the last minute if it will leave. If they had better management they could prosper. The bookers are very “unsalesmanlike” and don’t seem really informed or to care about booking more then one trip per person. These tours should be set up to rotate days so people could do 3 or 4 trips. They do too many to same site—dumb… I found both of these tour companies very inefficient in doing their bookings. Could not arrange boat travel down the Mackenzie nor fishing trip with either tour company. Both tour companies are very disorganized!!

These comments reflect a very real sense of frustration on the part of many tourists with what they perceive as the difference between myth and reality of advertising. Considering that the majority of visitors are in Inuvik for less than four days, it must be acknowledged that only a handful of the tours are available on a daily basis (or every other day), and that many tours are conducted only occasionally or every other season, unless an individual or couple is prepared to pay a group charter price (which is unrealistic). This differentiation is not reflected in the advertising of either tour company. The comments also suggest a lack of education of the visitors about the conditions that northern tour companies have to contend with. Most visitors come to their destination for an authentic northern experience. It will not do them any harm to experience first-hand the factors that control northern tourism: the weather, indigenous culture, and the role of tourism within land-based economies. Tourists must be made to understand that these factors do not just exist on paper (or in fine print), but are very real indeed. This, in itself, may be turned into a “tourism experience”. Honesty is at a premium.

The issue of educating tourists appears to be a recurrent theme. Some of the most motivated and successful aboriginal tourism oper-
ators are driven by a desire to inform visitors about the realities of northern land-based economies. Educating the tourist is also part and parcel of honest advertising. It is encouraging to note that this lesson is not lost on northern tourists. An amazing 70% of survey respondents replied to the question “Did this experience teach you anything about aboriginal people?” in the affirmative, by sharing some of their lessons. These lessons covered many different topics, such as the role of hunting and whaling in northern people’s lives, political and social issues, human nature, and social norms. The expressed opinions reflected a wide spectrum of experiences and perceptions. For the most part they did not appear reflective of stereotypes or pre-conceived ideas. The same is true for a variety of other comments volunteered by 47% of survey respondents. To the degree that northern aboriginal hosts are interested in getting their point across to southern or foreign guests, by and large, they are meeting with a receptive audience.

CONCLUSION

In the western Arctic, all stakeholders in the tourism industry appear to recognize, either implicitly or explicitly, that aboriginal people are very important, if not the most important partners in the industry. Northern tourism confronts all stakeholders with enormous challenges. Some of the most important challenges facing the Inuvialuit, the Gwich’in, and other northern natives relate to aboriginal people’s land-based way of life, to questions of how this way of life can be protected from tourism, and how this industry can be shaped to fit into this way of life. Both of these challenges have been successfully tackled by the Inuvialuit. Their approach represents an interesting example of how the provisions of their claim settlement agreement are employed to provide an operational environment for tourism, which bears Inuvialuit priorities of renewable resource harvesting in mind. Local outfitters capitalize on elements of seasonality and flexibility in both the industry and their mixed economy to combine the two. These strategies and tactics offer promising options for application and investigation in other parts of the North American Arctic. Nevertheless, a more widespread recognition on the part of community leadership and the public—that tourism (if properly controlled and realistically assessed) can really benefit communities, and a more sophisticated understanding of how these benefits can occur—are slow in coming, even in Tuktoyaktuk. The overall impact of tourism on host communities appears to be limited and generally benign, but more research is needed to gauge community perception and reaction. An impact survey of Tuktoyaktuk would be a useful start. It would also help to determine the feasibility of trying to improve the linkages of the industry to local supplies and services to further reduce the leakage, and it would assist in assessing tourism information and education needs at the community level.

Most people currently involved in tourism in the western Arctic look to the future with confidence, but also with some uncertainty. Northern aboriginal communities and ecotourism are both in a state of
rapid evolution, and their interface is a complicated one. Furthermore, both are operating in a highly fragile and unpredictable ecosystem. The future of the industry in this region, as visitors now encounter it, is inexorably bound to the evolution of northern local economies. In this evolution tourism has the potential for acting as an agent of change as well as an agent of preservation. The “authenticity” and “real life character” of the current tourism experience sometimes also makes it very difficult to manage. It is well-nigh impossible to predict, where the next generation is headed. As the Business Manager of Arctic Nature Tours muses, more tourists and more “professionalism” will make the industry easier to manage, but what will be lost in the process? (interview notes in July 1995). For the time being, it seems important to educate tourists about their role in northern aboriginal people’s lives, and to show them that their role is appreciated. They must be made to understand that, for however fleeting a moment, they are not just witnessing, but participating in a lifestyle that deserves to live on—for the people’s sake and for the land’s sake.

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