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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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TOWARD SUSTAINABLE CULTURAL TOURISM PLANNING

AND DEVELOPMENT TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

**Walter Jamieson et
Adela Galloway-Cosijn**

Both authors are well aware that their status as non-aboriginals dictates that they treat their role with caution. However, both have been invited to work with Native communities. The suggestions that follow in this article about approaches to training are based on two major initiatives. The first is related to the actual implementation of a training program, the Certificate in Heritage Resource Planning. Then, based on this training experience, a major survey was undertaken by the authors to further investigate training needs and attitudes of the aboriginal community. These initiatives are described in this article.

NATURE OF ABORIGINAL TOURISM

As the overall tourism market has grown more sophisticated, it has organized itself into a number of niche markets. The clear growth of ecotourism, nature tourism, and cultural tourism are significant indicators of an interest on the part of tourists to experience different types of environments and cultures. Within this context, the growing popularity of aboriginal tourism is noteworthy. European and North American tourists are increasingly interested in experiencing the natural environment related to aboriginal life, as well as aboriginal culture itself. This increased interest has:

- presented significant opportunities to aboriginal communities to create economic development within their community;
- increased awareness in the larger population regarding aboriginal issues and culture.

Aboriginal tourism has a number of dimensions, and we feel that it would be useful to begin by considering the range of development possibilities. The opportunities for community economic development that emanate from tourism can be significant, provided that planning and development are carried out in a sensitive manner. We recognize that the right and responsibility to control development must rest with the communities themselves. It is clear from our work and research that responses will be different from community to community. Some bands are well advanced in their tourism development, while others are considering the path that they should follow to take advantage of the cultural and economic benefits of tourism. It is clear, however, if one looks at the experience of non-aboriginal communities that the caution expressed about tourism by a number of people within the aboriginal community are well warranted.

Tourism, if not properly planned and controlled, can have significant negative

social, cultural, economic, and ecological impacts on all aspects of community life. Therefore, a sustainable and responsible approach to tourism development would be one that follows the principles of community economic development (CED). CED has been seen by many practitioners as an overall approach that meets community and environmental needs¹. Key CED principles are:

- The need for effective management practices, cooperation, and local participation in decision making.
- Intergenerational equity and the equitable distribution of wealth, resources, and food within the generations, on a global basis.
- The maintenance of ecosystems and biological diversity.
- Observing the principle of optimal sustainable yield in the use of natural resources, and living off the "interest" rather than the "principle" of these resources.

DIFFERENT FORMS OF ABORIGINAL TOURISM

Over time, aboriginal tourism has developed in a diversity of forms. The range of manifestations of tourism enterprise can be conceptualized as a continuum, points along which are differentiated based on one salient criterion: emphasis placed on cultural content.

At one extreme of the conceptual spectrum, there is tourism development which, though undertaken by Native

entrepreneurs, does not differ obviously from that engaged in by non-Native proponents. Examples of this type of project are hotels/motels/lodges, casinos, conference centres, ski resorts, airlines, golf courses, marinas, convenience stores, gas stations, and boat rentals. Many bands pursuing economic development through tourism look first to this type of "mainstream" tourism development. This is likely because of the perception that projects in this category are proven moneymakers with a long track record and wide appeal. Among individuals and communities backing this type of tourism project there is often the misplaced faith that (to quote the well-known maxim) "if we build it, they will come."

In the middle range of the continuum are enterprises of moderate cultural emphasis such as fishing/hunting outfitting or camps, restaurants serving traditional foods, shops selling traditional crafts, trail ride operations, and bison paddocks. This type of enterprise places Native culture on the "periphery" of the tourist experience. In this case, while culture is important in conditioning the flavor of the experience, it is not its focus. In some instances of tourism projects which fall into this range, the cultural aspect appears as a sort of "gimmick" which, it is hoped, will differentiate the operation from non-aboriginal ones like it. The concern here is not necessarily to convey information about authentic local Native culture to the visitor. Rather, an impressionistic, stereotyped image of a generic "Indian culture" may be deemed sufficient, provided it draws tourists to the site.

Clustered at the opposite pole of the conceptual continuum are those aboriginal tourism enterprises that are suffused with cultural content. For these projects, the showcasing and transmission of authentic, typically local, culture is their *raison d'être*. Examples of this form of development are:

- reserve tours,
- cultural centres,
- historic parks/museums,
- tipi villages,
- powwows,
- nature-based expeditions and camps.

Culture, in these instances, has as much—and sometimes more—to do with the host Native community as it does with potential visitors. "Tourists" typically come, not to be entertained or diverted, but expressly to learn something about a culture different from their own. For these reasons, it is imperative that the tourism operation strive to reflect faithfully the authentic qualities of the local culture. Since visitors' expectations of the tourism experience tend to diverge significantly from those of visitors to more "mainstream" developments, the substance of the experience—not just its packaging—is crucial. It is this type of tourism enterprise that simultaneously presents the opportunity for First Nations communities and individuals to learn about themselves.

It is worth noting that there is a roughly inverse correspondence between the level of cultural content and a project's scale. As a general rule, the more closely an enterprise adheres to the "mainstream" model of development (low cultural content), the larger its scale. As one moves along the continuum toward the more pervasive influence of cultural content, projects tend to be moderate in scale. It seems fair to infer that a key reason for this inverse relationship is the comparative ease with which authenticity in aboriginal culture can be reflected and represented at a small-to-moderate scale. In addition, small scale and incremental development are more manageable for the individual or group proponent who may not have extensive experience in tourism development. Small steps may also be more acceptable and accessible to the whole community.

We are therefore defining aboriginal cultural tourism as "tourism that seeks to understand and participate in various dimensions of aboriginal life." There is recognition, however, that various parts of the native culture should not, and will not, be open for tourism participation. Given the concern for the fragility of the spiritual dimensions of many aboriginal communities, certain aspects of aboriginal culture may not be offered to the tourist. One has to recognize, as is the case in other forms of cultural tourism, that there are limits to the levels of visitor participation. This concern requires a clear consensus on the part of communities in terms of what will form a legitimate part of tourism development.

ISSUES RELATING TO ABORIGINAL CULTURAL TOURISM

We felt that it was important to look briefly at the range of opportunities that typically present themselves in the context of aboriginal cultural tourism. These opportunities can include:

- increased funds for conservation,
- increased community income,
- new employment opportunities,
- new induced employment opportunities,
- increased tax base,
- increased cultural pride,
- improved infrastructure,
- revival of crafts and traditions,
- higher visibility leading to increased awareness of aboriginal cultures.

It is clear that to ensure these opportunities are realized, the following are necessary:

- broad community acceptance of tourism,
- common sharing of a vision for tourism,
- open participative forms of decision making related to planning and development decisions,
- strong equity concerns.

While the forms of planning and decision making will vary from community to community, experience has demonstrated that a common vision is essential to achieve the important benefits that can come about from cultural tourism development. However, given the fragile and non-renewable nature of some dimensions of the cultural product, limits and thresholds must be integrated into tourism strategies. It is not our purpose here to talk in more detail about this, but it is clear that any training response has to take these concerns into account.

There are also a number of possible risks related to cultural tourism development:

- poor quality of jobs,
- stress on local population,
- increased costs,

- congestion,
- impact on natural and cultural resources,
- loss of sense of community,
- increased taxes,
- inauthentic development,
- pollution,
- increased crime.

CERTIFICATE IN HERITAGE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

In 1993, Treaty 7 communities, in particular the Peigan and Siksika Nations, approached the Historical Resources Intern Program at the University of Calgary to deliver a training program that would allow aboriginal people from within southern Alberta to develop new skills and knowledge in the area of cultural resource management. The impetus for the training came from initiatives in each community to develop cultural centres, as well as to address their tourism concerns. In the Peigan Nation, the Keep Our Circle Strong project has produced significant benefits in helping to increase community cultural pride and ownership. The Siksika Nation has ambitious plans and designs for a large interpretive centre on their reserve. Given time and resource constraints, the decision was made to adapt the Certificate in Heritage Resource Management to First Nations' needs. The Certificate forms part of the Historical Resources Intern Program and is offered through the Faculty of Continuing Education with academic direction provided by the Centre for Environmental Design Research and Outreach.

The Certificate is designed for people working in the field who possess at least a high school education. It combines mandatory core courses, option courses, and a practicum. The Certificate covers three hundred hours and has the following course requirements (figure 1).

It was recognized that offering the Certificate to an aboriginal audience without modification was not an ideal solution. Therefore, it was felt that, given the pressing need for instruction in the Treaty 7 communities, the Certificate—with amendments—would fill an important need. Ten participants were identified who

COURSES	CREDIT HOURS
Introduction to Heritage Resource Management	24
Material Culture Studies	24
Heritage Resource Management Interpretation	16
General Principles of Cultural Tourism/Ecotourism	16
General Principles of Heritage Area Planning	16
General Principles of Materials and their Conservation	16
Curatorship: Principles and Practice	16
General Principles of Building Conservation	16
Option Course	16
Option Course	16
Practicum	124
TOTAL	300

not only took the courses over a one-year period, but also had internships with museums and other cultural groups. The Certificate, as amended, offered the regular core courses identified above, with the addition of two new courses, one in interpretation for aboriginal communities, and the other in the care and conservation of aboriginal collections. Both courses were offered at Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump in southern Alberta, and were designed specifically to respond to the particular needs of the communities. In addition, a major symposium on Planning for Aboriginal Cultural Tourism was held. The symposium was an important event in helping to define the nature of aboriginal cultural tourism and many of its concerns. Participants from across Canada attended the event. A symposium proceeding was developed and is available from the Centre for Environmental Design Research and Outreach.

Three of the original participants have graduated from the Certificate. Feedback from the communities has been positive and has been utilized in developing a specific Certificate in Aboriginal Heritage Resource Management with a tourism focus. The aboriginal participants took courses with other Certificate attendees in Edmonton and Calgary. While some found travelling to these urban centres inconvenient, others found the interaction with a range of practitioners to be benefi-

cial. The combination of centrally offered courses with specially designed courses in Native locales seemed to have worked very well.

The Certificate is now offered almost completely by distance education using specially designed video and print materials. Feedback from non-aboriginal participants has been enthusiastic. Many prefer the opportunity to work at their own pace and review lecture material when necessary. Employers are also supportive, given budget realities in many agencies and institutions. It remains to be seen how aboriginal participants will respond to distance delivery.

TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

In order to obtain further information on developing a specific tourism certificate, the authors conducted a training needs assessment in early 1996. The assessment used a survey to define and organize training needs. Survey respondents—the majority of whom were economic, tourism, and education/training coordinators from First Nations band administrations across Canada—were asked for their guidance and expertise in five broad areas relating to training needs:

- training content,
- mode of delivery,

- level of training difficulty,
- commitment (of training participants and/or sponsoring organizations),
- desired training outcomes.

Essentially, what the results demonstrated was that either a training program for aboriginal tourism entrepreneurs would have to be designed "from the ground up," or any existing training program originally aimed at a non-aboriginal audience would have to be revised and adapted. There was consensus among survey respondents that, in order for a training program to be effective, it would have to address certain fundamental issues of both content and delivery. Without these basic characteristics, respondents reported that the program would fail to meet its goals. It is interesting to compare these findings with the results of the Certificate delivery described above.

ISSUES IN DEVELOPING A TRAINING APPROACH BASED ON CED PRINCIPLES

The survey identified a number of critical issues in the design and delivery of an aboriginal tourism training program. It is important to note that what follows are the results of the survey and are not the opinions of the authors.

Community Involvement

The question of community involvement was seen as basic to any community based tourism process approach. This concern took on added complexity when applied to the aboriginal context. The necessity for community preparation—including provision of information about tourism and its impacts, discussion of alternatives, and decision on whether and how to proceed toward development—were seen as necessary preconditions to actual tourism development that adheres to a CED model. The same community preparation should take place prior to implementation of a training program for community members. Given the scarcity of band resources—often the sole source of funding for training—there should be agreement among band members that tourism training is a fruitful way to invest those funds. Arguably, the same sort of consultation should be held in selecting training candidates. The blessing of chief and council is not

a sufficient indicator of community consent. There should be an opportunity for all voices to be heard before proceeding with a tourism training program. The program should be "vetted," if not by the community at large, then by a steering committee that has authority to speak on behalf of community members.

The support of elders appears to be a decisive factor in the acceptance of a training program. Support is given on condition that this influential group "keep tabs" on its progress. Of particular note is the role played by elders in deciding on the legitimacy of tourism-related skills included in a training program; while some may be considered "legitimate" in the local and traditional context, others may not. For example, while hospitality-related and wilderness skills may fit in comfortably with traditional practice and custom, marketing and leadership skills might be viewed by elders as dissonant with tradition and therefore not legitimate in the training context.

The goal of consultation is to give the community itself the power to determine its own tourism goals and the skills it will need to realize these goals. A maxim to bear in mind in this connection is that each community is the expert on its own needs. It therefore must be given the opportunity to direct the design of a training program that is appropriate to its unique local circumstances, culture, and mores. A training curriculum that meets this crucial criterion cannot be arrived at according to a pre-established schedule, but must be the product of genuine dialogue between the design facilitator and all interested community members. It is a process that will take time.

Who Should Train?

The answer to the critical question of who should train is embedded in the CED philosophy. If local capacity building is accepted as a guiding principle, then the ultimate goal of training should be to transfer not only tourism development skills but also the training skills themselves to local people. Ultimately, then, those who train will be members of the community and, most likely, aboriginal themselves.

Historically and currently, many teachers and trainers working in aboriginal com-

munities are drawn from outside the community; most are non-Native. This does not seem to be a source of tension or resentment in most communities; it is felt that, more important than a trainer's ethnicity, are his/her personal qualities, professional qualifications, and level of cross-cultural awareness. Others, however, argue in favor of Native trainers—preferably drawn from the local area—for their ability to dissolve cultural and linguistic barriers and to provide trainees with role models.

Training Format and Level of Difficulty

In many aboriginal communities, the average level of educational attainment is Grade Ten; it is the rare individual who proceeds to the post-secondary level. Given regional variation in language and literacy, it cannot be taken for granted that all trainees will feel at ease speaking, reading, and writing in English or French.

These considerations have important implications for the format and orientation of a tourism training program. An excellent way to facilitate and optimize achievement under these circumstances is to tailor programs in such a way that they minimize reading and written work, and emphasize instead practical, "hands-on" work and evaluation. A key element of such a practice-oriented program can be one or more practicums during which trainees have an opportunity to test and hone learned skills, as well as to make contacts and build confidence in their abilities. A practicum can also be instrumental in ensuring that trainees are job-ready when the program is completed. It is also recognized that with increasing levels of attainment of high school diplomas, more mainstream approaches to training may be feasible.

Employability

Added to the above considerations is the high unemployment in many aboriginal communities. This reality sharpens the imperative for tourism training to be practical, achievable within a specific time frame, and linked in an obvious way to subsequent employment. Bands do not generally have the budgets to sponsor training candidates over the extended period of time it would take, for example, to complete a university degree. If a

program is designed to be short, practical, and leading to employment—producing a tangible, “quick return on investment”—it is more likely that both individuals and band administrations will be motivated to participate and, once committed, will remain so.

Accreditation

Hand-in-hand with the question of employability goes that of accreditation. This is an issue that has garnered a great deal of emphasis among proponents of aboriginal tourism. The term “accreditation” is understood here to denote adherence of a training program curriculum to an established set of standards. The purpose of accreditation is to ensure not only uniformity in product and service delivery throughout a region, province, or nation, but also to instill confidence among potential consumers in the credibility and professionalism of accredited individuals. Many feel that accreditation should be uniform across the tourism industry, not specific to the aboriginal sector, in order that graduates of aboriginal tourism training programs have equal standing with their non-aboriginal peers.

A complementary perspective on accreditation is equally compelling, and must be given consideration. Learned skills must not only be recognized by the broader tourism industry, but equally by the community itself. The earlier point was made that elders, as influential band members, could act to affirm or undermine the legitimacy of tourism skills with respect to community mores. Skill legitimacy must be validated both by the standards of the industry and those of the community. The blessing of the community can be viewed as a “traditional accreditation,” of equal importance to the industry accreditation.

DELIVERY OF ABORIGINAL CULTURAL TOURISM TRAINING

There are three modes that have been suggested for use individually or in combination, to deliver tourism training to aboriginal communities:

- in a central location (for example, a regional centre or institution),
- in the community,
- by distance education.

There are advantages and constraints associated with each mode. In some cases, combining modes can assist in balancing costs against benefits; in others—particularly in remote communities—circumstances may dictate which method of delivery is feasible.

In a Central Location

Budget realities and the number of participants from a community have a major impact on delivery modes. There is no doubt that centrally delivered courses can be cost-effective, especially when only small numbers are to be trained from each community. A central location does not have to be in an urban centre but could be a community college or training facility in an Aboriginal community where participants from several bands can come together for training sessions. This is the approach being taken in the new Treaty 7 initiative.

Bringing people together also has the advantage of exposing participants to new ideas and perspectives. This is especially important in tourism training.

Within the Community

According to the CED paradigm, the preferred mode of curriculum delivery is within the community. The overarching rationale for training in the community is to strengthen community ownership of a program and to build skills at the local level. Training locally enhances program accessibility for community members for a number of cogent reasons that demonstrate the advantages of training locally versus training at a central facility:

- family and other community ties are not disrupted;
- many communities have facilities (such as schools, colleges, and lodges) which can be used for instructional sessions;
- it is more cost-effective to bring one or two trainers to (or hire them from within) the community, than for a larger number of trainees to travel to a distant centre;
- band training resources can be kept in the community.

Distance Learning

For many in aboriginal communities, audiovisual and computer technology may

provide a less than optimal means of delivery. Distance learning cannot be adapted to training which emphasizes “hands-on,” practical activities, and evaluation. Equally important in overcoming language and cultural barriers is the multi-faceted communication that can only come from face-to-face contact. Few people outside the band office and local college have the skills required to navigate easily in a computer medium, whether software, CD-ROM, or the Internet. Most bands own only a few computers; the home computer is extremely rare in aboriginal communities.

Newer and more sophisticated distance techniques may alter this assessment of distance techniques. In some more remote locations with small populations, well-designed distance material may be the optimum way of introducing community members to critical skills and knowledge.

SUBSTANTIVE AREAS OF ABORIGINAL CULTURAL TOURISM TRAINING

It is clear that tourism as a global industry carries with it the need for aboriginal communities to acquire specific, and what can be seen as universal, skills in ensuring the success of tourism ventures within aboriginal communities. Without this knowledge and skill it will be very difficult for these communities to be successful and competitive. We would argue that there are some basic knowledge and skill sets that are necessary in dealing with the larger field of tourism planning and development. Methods to obtain and deliver sets are variable.

Based on our research and experience we would like to suggest what we feel are required knowledge and skills. We have divided the required expertise into three sets². Preliminary course descriptions are available from the authors³.

Heritage Resource Management Skills

If one of the important objectives of aboriginal cultural tourism is to provide opportunities for cultural renewal and increasing community pride, then we would suggest that a firm understanding of the nature of the culture and how to present it is essential. Substantive areas should include:

- material culture,
- care of collections,
- history and practice of heritage resource management,
- Native history.

Tourism Planning and Development

The following core tourism planning and development knowledge and skills are desirable:

- developing a tourism strategy,
- research methods: understanding demographics and market trends,
- the business of tourism,
- site and destination development,
- understanding tourism economic potentials,
- planning for tourism.

A series of option courses should be considered in light of local and regional situations. They could include:

- ecotourism,
- wildlife tourism,
- physical planning and design,
- festival and events,
- heritage area planning.

Integration of Learned Knowledge and Skills

It is also our experience that an integrative process is required to allow particular skills and knowledge to be brought together effectively. A practicum that could be either a group or an individual one is, from our perspective, an essential element in ensuring the success of the program.

CONCLUSION

In this article we have described the nature of aboriginal cultural tourism as well as our experience in the field. We have concluded that the development of a training program should include sustainable and community economic development principles, whether it is delivered in a specific community, by distance, or in a central location.

Our purpose in presenting our findings and ideas on the development of a training curriculum is to invite practitioners to test and adapt them in practice. Budgets, possible numbers of participants, their

academic preparation, distances, availability of facilitators, and the level of community preparation all influence the nature of the delivery process and mode.

We recognize that there is a tension with establishing nationally/regionally recognized accredited training programs and standards and encouraging specifically designed and locally based initiatives. Adhering to a national or regional program will require that all training initiatives should have common skill and knowledge sets. In addition, the nature of the industry demands that all training programs introduce a basic understanding of tourism knowledge as described earlier in this article. Developing a common and accepted set of knowledge and skills is a priority within the aboriginal tourism community.

When community based training is possible, our research indicates that the training curriculum should be designed and delivered initially on a small scale. Obtaining the informed consent of community members, not only chief and council, to participate in a pilot project, is a fundamental precondition for implementation. Any practitioner undertaking a pilot project based on the CED model will have to prepare him- or herself for the time commitment involved. Relationships of trust with community members are indispensable to successful training design and implementation. The willingness to invest time, and the ability to listen well, are the practitioner's most valuable resources in this context.

When budgets and numbers mandate centrally-based delivery, the training approach adopted should take into account many of the concerns raised about that form of delivery in this article. The problems created by a central location for some aboriginal people can be in part compensated for by the advantages of the range of option and experience of participants afforded by shared opportunities.

Distance techniques have the potential to offer portions or all of a training initiative and aboriginal people must be involved in both the selection of technology and substantive development.

The exact nature of the substance of the training as well as training modes will vary from community to community and we

look forward to hearing of test cases that allow First Nation communities to develop responsive training mechanisms.

The authors have been involved in various aspects of the aboriginal tourism sector.

Walter Jamieson has worked with communities in Southern Alberta on the delivery of cultural resource management training opportunities. As Director of the Historical Resources Intern Program, he worked with Treaty 7 communities in developing a specific one-year certificate for community members. The nature of this experience is described in the article. Since then he has been working with Treaty 7 representatives in developing a training program that will allow members of these communities to participate fully and effectively in aboriginal cultural tourism development within their communities and the region.

Adela Galloway-Cosijn is a graduate student in the Faculty of Environmental Design (Planning) at the University of Calgary. She is currently working on a Master's Degree Project that involves the design and pilot implementation of a training program for aboriginal tourism entrepreneurs. In 1995, she worked with the Whitefish Lake First Nation (Atikameg, AB) to conduct a tourism feasibility study on their reserve lands. Ms. Galloway-Cosijn first became involved in the area of aboriginal tourism while working as a wilderness guide in Haida Gwaii (Queen Charlotte Islands, BC) in the late 1980s.

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NOTES

- 1 For further information on CED we would recommend the Centre for Community Enterprise, <http://www.cedworks.com> (1-888-255-6779).
- 2 We wish to acknowledge the participation of Jacqueline Mann in the development of some of this material.
- 3 The authors can be reached at the Centre for Environmental Design and Outreach, University of Calgary, at (403) 220-8669. W. Jamieson email : WJTourism@AOL.com. A. Cosijn email : cosijna@cadvision.com.

