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The Economic Value of Identity: (re)thinking Maori tourism

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Introduction

“Promoters of a specifically Māori tourist experience need to bear firmly in mind that Māori culture is tribal. This means that it will vary from tribe to tribe and this diversity needs to be positively encouraged” (Māori Tourism Taskforce, 1987).

Territory-identifications, for the most part, establish differences between Indigenous Māori groups in New Zealand. When asked “who are you?”, Māori may answer along individual, *hapu* (sub-tribe), *iwi* (tribal) or collective dimensions. All dimensions are interrelated. This chapter draws from doctorate studies and expands on a research project titled *Increasing investment in Māori Tourism: The economic value of identity*, undertaken between 2010 and 2012 by the author. It examines the economics of identity in relation to (re)thinking Māori tourism in New Zealand. The first part of the paper theoretically challenges tourism academia to move toward more flexible forms of understanding and interpreting identifications and the “new sense/new-register” (Hollinshead, 2010) aspirations of Indigenous populations today – notably those in ambiguous/hybrid postcolonial settings. The second part of the paper examines, in a case study of Māori tourism development in Otepoti¹ Dunedin, the way in which Māori negotiate the economics of identity in a tourism context. The premise here is that tribal (and thus regional)

1 Otepoti is the Maori name for Dunedin, and means “the place of the corners”.

differences are key elements of the development and sustainability of the Māori tourism product. Case study methodology integrates social theories of identity with Māori epistemology that moves beyond traditional activity-based analyses of tourism to an approach that is space and subject-centred. As a result, Indigenous Māori develop an economics of identity.

Māori culture

Māori are the *tangata whenua* or 'people of the land' and are officially recognised as the Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand. Despite the enormous impacts of colonization, Maori have retained strong and thriving tribal traditions. Tribes were the key social, economic and political units of Māoridom represented in two forms: the *hapu* or sub tribe and *iwi*. Each *iwi* had its own history, myths, proverbs, dialect, customs and practices, and therefore, its own cultural identity (King, 1992; Walker, 2004). Although *iwi* share a degree of common cultural tradition they also chose to accentuate differences through geographical territories and histories by constructing cultural boundaries on a tribal basis. Tribal autonomy took precedence over any view of a unified ethnic collective; the term 'Māori' grew out of contact with European settlers (*Pakeha*) and the current choice of either Māori or *iwi/hapu* is a reflection of the wider social construct that both accommodates and is in tension with more particularistic and traditional lines of affiliation. Furthermore, Māori cultural identity is underpinned by a distinct system of values and knowledge known as *whakapapa*; an ordering principle and spiritual link between generations (Spiller & Stockdale, 2012). As an oral culture, Māori used various techniques to communicate information and knowledge including *waiata* (songs), *whakatauki* (proverbs), and *purakau* (folklore). Visual art forms such as carving and weaving also expressed a form of oral tradition and cultural identity through association with myths and legends. Akin to many Indigenous peoples, Māori had a holistic world view, with a relational epistemology that linked the natural and cultural world, through past, present and future.

For the purposes of this chapter, my discussion focuses on Ngai Tahu, the recognised *iwi* of Te Waipounamu, the South Island of New Zealand. Ngai Tahu hold rights as *tangata whenua* with a *rohe* (tribal homeland), the largest in New Zealand at over 80% of the South Island and constituting 18 *rununga* (governing council/administrative body) representing geographi-

cal areas (www.ngaitahu.iwi.nz). Under the Ngai Tahu Claims Settlement Act 1998, economic redress of \$170million in Treaty settlement was made, and this included the right and opportunity to buy certain Crown assets, enabling the tribe to fund their social and cultural development. Since then, Ngai Tahu has invested in diverse tourism interests including businesses with non-cultural sectors such as Queenstown based operation, Shotover Jet. By 2016, Ngai Tahu Tourism has broadened its geographical reach to nine nationwide businesses including five visitor attractions throughout the South Island; one of the most notable of these being Whale Watch Kaikoura. The company philosophy is one that promotes strong *iwi* identity with intrinsic connection to the natural landscape and intergenerational wellbeing. This identification is iterated in the *iwi*'s mission statement:

“Mō tātou, ā, mō kā uri, ā muri ake nei: for us and our children after us”.

Hybridity: (re)thinking Māori tourism

“In tourism, ethnic populations are frequently far from being as distinct and singular as the brochure designers and travel promoters would have it” (Hollinshead, 1998:124-25)

Keeping pace with consumer demand and changing motivations means constructing a vast array of cultural and experiential tourism experiences that more readily admit the heterogeneity and the hybridity of cultural, material and spatial repertoires within which tourism operates. In what follows, I describe Māori culture and tourism development through a postcolonial lens of hybridity. In this respect, I am not using hybridity in its more dominant theoretical and political form (re-inscribing binary thinking) but its more variegated vocabulary of heterogeneity, multiplicity and difference. Accordingly, I apply the concept of hybridity as one transformed into cultural creativity and new configurations of diversity.

Since the late nineteenth century, the tourism industry has focused on two things in selling holidays to New Zealand: the natural landscape and Māori culture. Tourism New Zealand (TNZ) continues to concentrate on the former theme with its successful global campaign 100% PURE. Though Māori have been involved in tourism for more than 160 years, their identity as tourist ‘attractions’ rather than tourism ‘managers’ has to some extent marginalized Māori from the control of their own cultural expression (Amoamo & Thompson, 2010). Prior to the 1990s, much of New Zealand’s