Sustainability, Ethics, and Authenticity in Indigenous Tourism: The Case of Eskasoni Cultural Journeys on Goat Island

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ABSTRACT

Cape Breton Island (Nova Scotia, Canada) is well known as an island tourism destination, recognized for its rich natural beauty, as well as cultural and heritage products. Eskasoni First Nation is the largest of the five Mi'kmaw communities located on Unama'ki (Cape Breton Island), and until recently Mi'kmaw communities were not recognized as a significant part of the Cape Breton tourism product mix. Tourism as a means of encouraging economic development is not uncommon internationally, and while tourism growth has been significant on the island, questions remain regarding its ethics and authenticity in relation to community economic development. This paper explores the development of an Indigenous (Mi'kmaw) cultural heritage ecotourism product through a community-led approach. Using Eskasoni Cultural Journeys as a case study, the research presented in this paper questions sustainability through the lens of triple bottom line (TBL) accounting, which looks at economic, social, and environmental aspects of development, as well as ethical business practices, such as authenticity and community well-being.

INTRODUCTION

Eskasoni First Nation is the largest Mi'kmaq-speaking community in the world, with a population of more than 4300. It is one of five Mi'kmaw communities located on Unama'ki (Cape Breton Island), Nova Scotia, Canada. Cape Breton Island (CBI) is well known as an

island tourism destination, recognized for its rich natural beauty, as well as cultural and heritage products. This is largely due to focused strategic investment in the development of the local tourism infrastructure, such as the Cabot Trail driving route, the Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Site, and events around Celtic culture. The effort to develop a diversified economy has followed a drastic downturn in the industrial development of coal and ore, and was mainly driven by the Federal Government through the 1980s and 1990s (Brown, 1998; 2009). Until recently Mi'kmaw communities were not recognized as a significant part of the CBI tourism product mix.

Tourism as a means of encouraging economic development is not uncommon internationally. Since the 1980s, the market share of emerging economies in the tourism industry grew from 35% to 45% and is expected to continue. In 2010, the direct revenue from tourism spending in Nova Scotia was $2.02 billion, of which the CBI region made up 12% (Nova Scotia Visitor Economy Fact Sheet, 2013). Spending on Indigenous tourism products in particular has been increasing as well, but the metrics have been inconsistently captured. In a report recently released by the Aboriginal Tourism Association of Canada (ATAC, 2015), the direct impact was estimated to be $2.65 billion in 2014, a growth of 16% since 2002. In the same report, Aboriginal tourism products from the Atlantic region represented 8.2% of all Aboriginal tourism products in Canada.

While the growth has been significant in the region and in the specific sector, the discussion and debate around tourism policy and the implications of tourism have also increased. Can tourism products create economic and social benefit? Is there a right way to do tourism development? Can tourism be sustainable? Questions of ethics are common as well, especially when considering Indigenous tourism product development. What is authentic in Indigenous products? Are these products taking advantage of disadvantaged communities, or are they helping to create capacity and opportunities to teach others and revive cultures?

This paper explores the development of an Indigenous (Mi'kmaw) cultural heritage ecotourism product through a community-led approach. Eskasoni Cultural Journeys (ECJ), now an established tourism product, received an award for product development of the year from Destination Cape Breton (Cape Breton Post, 2014). More recently, in 2016, ECJ was one of three finalists for the ATAC National Aboriginal Cultural Tourism Award.[1] In this paper, questions of sustainability are considered through the lens of triple bottom line (TBL) accounting, which looks at economic, social, and environmental aspects of development, and ethical business practices (authenticity and community well-being). The study investigates whether the blending of the community-led approach with the prime components of sustainable tourism may ultimately lead to continued growth of an attraction that is both ethical and economically viable.

LOCAL CONTEXT

In the 1980s, the Canadian government invested heavily in CBI. In response to the rapid downturn in the extractive industry sectors, issues of poverty were of great concern to the provincial and federal governments. After multiple investments in the coal and steel indus-

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[1] See Tourism Industry Association of Canada (TIAC), "2016 Canadian Tourism Award Winners & Finalists", http://tiac.travel/2016_Finalists.html

tries, it was clear that these industries were no longer economically feasible; however, the communities of CBI were heavily dependent on these industries. At its peak, the coal and steel industry represented 80% of the CBI economy. Therefore, the federal government decided to strategically invest in projects intended to diversify the economies of the island. The creation of a tourism sector was one significant component of the diversification strategy. Governments had always invested in maintaining the scenic driving route along the Cabot Trail, but in just a few years there was a rapid increase in tourism products throughout CBI, including the development of golf resorts, heritage centres and museums, national parks, provincial heritage sites, and the Celtic Colours festival (Brown, 1998). A Tourism Cape Breton agency was also created with the sole purpose of marketing CBI as an international tourist destination. Although Eskasoni is situated in the central area of the island, on the shores of the Bras d' Or Lake, this area has few tourism products or services available. Culture and heritage tourism was a central theme of the development strategy, but the local Mi'kmaw communities did not play a central role in the development projects; rather, development was heavily focused on Celtic and, to a lesser extent, Acadian culture. Mi'kmaw stories and culture were not featured; instead, the region became known for its Celtic heritage, as well as for being the site of some of the earliest European settlements in Canada at St. Peter's, Baddeck, Louisbourg, and Cheticamp, for example.

Prior to developing ECJ, the community of Eskasoni tried many times to participate in the formal tourism strategy, with varying degrees of success (discussed below). A new approach was employed in the development of ECJ — one that focused on the community while creating an experiential and sustainable product, community-based tourism (CBT). In 2009, almost 30 years after the initial federal investment in CBI tourism, ECJ started at a grassroots level, with Elder buy-in and initial Elder training in tourism and customer service. Consultants worked with the Elders, the community, the proximal tourism industry, and various levels of government to lay the fundamental product development groundwork with the Elders' participation and overall community support. Today, ECJ offers boat tours on the Bras d'Or Lake (the centre of the Bras d'Or Lake Biosphere Reserve) and interpretive programming along the trails of Goat Island, with sights clearly set on sustainable future development.

Eskasoni Cultural Journeys

The traditional territory of the Mi'kmaq, which encompasses Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and parts of New Brunswick, Newfoundland, and Quebec in Canada, as well as northern Maine in the United States, is referred to as Mi'kma'ki. Eskasoni, the largest Mi'kmaw community, is located on Cape Breton Island. Its name is derived from the Mi'kmaw word *We'kwistoqnik*, which means "where the fir trees are plentiful." Eskasoni was first surveyed in 1832, and two years later officially became a reserve covering approximately 2800 acres of land. Census numbers indicate that in 1871 there were only 125 inhabitants. Today, the population of Eskasoni First Nation is 4359, with 3704 living on reserve (AANDC, 2015). In 1958, the Eskasoni Band Council was formed, and today that leadership structure oversees a young, culturally proud population. The community has a world-renowned First Nation health centre, a thriving band-owned fishery, and an emerging tourism presence (Eskasoni First Nation, 2017). It also operates its own school system, from kindergarten to grade 12. In fall of 2015, a Mi'kmaw immersion school for levels kindergarten

through grade 5 was opened. ECJ is the primary component of the community-based, cultural tourism infrastructure.

ECJ is located on Goat Island. The vision to develop this island for tourism emerged more than 50 years ago, when the current Chief's grandfather had a dream of tourism development on the land. As a result, the island was designated for tourism development via a band council resolution in 1964 (Denny, personal communication, May 27, 2015). Over the years, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, community members became involved in various cultural revitalization initiatives, which could have been mobilized as tourism products, but were not. For example, a performance troupe dedicated to Mi'kmaw traditional songs and dances was established, and the group travelled to festivals and other events, but an Eskasoni-based attraction around that group was not developed. This may be because such cultural initiatives were more concerned with cultural revitalization within the community during this time period, rather than being more outwardly motivated. By the mid-2000s, the economic development officer in Eskasoni, Tracy Menge, began investigating different options for tourism development in the community, bolstered by the interest and support of Maureen Carroll, who had identified the need for Aboriginal tourism products in Cape Breton during her tenure as the director of marketing for Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) in the late 1990s. The two had collaborated on initiatives to bring Aboriginal artisans to a trade show in 1997 and train youth in hospitality in 2003 (Carroll, personal communication, March 23, 2015). There was an attempt within the community to provide a tour experience as part of a cruise ship bus package. The tourists were greeted by community members at the powwow grounds, but the community was not adequately prepared to meet their needs in the long term. It was not until 2009 that the vision specifically for ECJ emerged and was initiated. This vision was for a cultural tourism experience that would tie together the shared stories of Mi'kmaq and Gaels in Cape Breton (Menge, personal communication, May 1, 2015).

While the vision was big, the initial steps towards achieving it were small. Those involved wanted to create an experience for tourists without immediately investing capital in the development of a building or other costly infrastructure (Menge, personal communication, May 1, 2015). Working with Maureen Carroll as a consultant, a four-phase plan to develop Goat Island was established, and community consultation sessions were held to initiate it (Denny, personal communication, May 27, 2015). They focused on training interpreters first, since Mi'kmaw knowledge holders were considered central to the success of any tourism offering. The first attempt at training was with a younger group who would be prepared to eventually work in the tourism industry, but the participants at that time had different priorities. Then they came across a program called Targeted Initiative for Older Workers, where they saw the opportunity to train some community members to be interpreters. Initially 20 community members participated in the training, and subsequently 10 identified themselves as interested in being a core group who could share Mi'kmaw traditional practices and culture with tourists (Elders, personal communications, April 8, 2015). ECJ partnered with the Highland Village Museum in Iona, also located along the Bras d'Or Lake, to mentor staff and gain first-hand experience working at a living oral history site. The value of the partnership and its cross-cultural exchange was felt by both parties, and they continue to work together on the development of a tourism package and the marketing of their two, intertwined stories (Chaisson, personal communication, April 22, 2015).

Under the leadership of Chief Charlie Joe Dennis, the walking trail was cut (Denny, personal communication, May 27, 2015). Regalia and other equipment required to provide

tours was purchased. The first full year of operations was in 2012, with group school tours, other tours, special events, and individual tours (Carroll, personal communication, March 23, 2015). Over the next three years, the team working on ECJ obtained financial support to outfit boats and complete upgrades to the island, which included creating a parking lot, developing five "villages" for interpretation, and installing a visitor kiosk (MacDonald, personal communication, March 25, 2015). For example, boats that were too big for lobster fishing and too small to meet shrimp fishing standards were refitted with funding from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans so that they could carry 75–100 people on the Bras d'Or Lake as part of a larger tour (Denny, personal communication, May 27, 2015). The planned, gradual nature of this tourism development has been key to its success, instilling pride in the community and increasing community support for the initiative with each achievement (MacDonald, personal communication, March 25, 2015; Menge, personal communication, May 1, 2015).

Tourists access Goat Island via a causeway. The walking trail, a 2.2km loop around the small island, forms the basis of the tourist experience, but is also used by community members. At various points along the trail, there are interpretive nodes, referred to as "villages", which include structures (such as a wigwam and a sweat lodge) and interpretive panels. Each node provides a unique vantage point from which to view the lake and surrounding environment. At the nodes, cultural demonstrations and interpretation by heritage animators also occur. These demonstrations vary depending on the availability of Elders on any given day. For example, during a tour in early July 2015, a beading workshop was set up during which participants could make a pair of earrings. During an October 2015 tour, participants learned the basics of basket weaving by making a bookmark out of Ash splints and sinew. Other performances and demonstrations include storytelling and music. Indeed, the current chief, Leroy Denny, often welcomes tourists to his community, greeting them with a traditional Mi'kmaw song (Denny, personal communication, May 27, 2015). Expanded tours are also available and may incorporate a guided tour of the Bras d'Or Lake, a feast with traditional Mi'kmaw food, or a multi-cultural tour package that also visits the Highland Village Museum in Iona.

ECJ has also attracted the interest of the cruise ship industry. Cruise passengers visiting the Port of Sydney have the option of being bused to Eskasoni (approximately 40km away) and experiencing Mi'kmaw culture through ECJ. In 2015, there were 54 cruise ship tours scheduled. Additional new developments in 2016 and 2017 have included infrastructure, such as a stage and enhanced entranceway, an expanded gift shop with more local inventory, and connection to the Trans-Canada Trail.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Sustainable tourism is a widely recognized phenomenon, yet it is also complicated and somewhat contested. Although many focus on the environmental or "green" side of sustainability, according to the UNWTO (n.d.), sustainable tourism "takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities." Industry standards and certification programs have been established to help practitioners consistently apply the various complicated issues (see Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2015). At the same time, global NGOs have created additional diverse metrics and campaigns that might appeal to

responsible consumers (see STI, 2015). Sustainable tourism is still a broad and diverse area of study; thus, in this paper we have endeavoured to consider multiple facets by focusing on topics commonly considered, including economic, social, and environmental aspects. By drawing on a triple bottom line (TBL) framework (ff. Stoddard, Pollard, & Evans, 2012), we aim to provide some simple, yet nuanced insights into the discussion. The UNWTO (n.d.) encourage principles for sustainable tourism that complement the TBL approach, stating that sustainable tourism should:

1. Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.
2. Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.
3. Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation.

Cultural authenticity is an additional ethical consideration because it is common in discussions about sustainable Aboriginal tourism (see Ryan & Aicken, 2005; Zeppel, 2006; Weaver, 2010). While it is not typically included in the TBL framework, although it is closely related to the social dimension, we have chosen to discuss it separately.

Ethics and Cultural Authenticity

Although the word Indigenous is commonly used internationally, in the Canadian context Aboriginal has been used more frequently because it is a term recognized in the constitution as being inclusive of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. Lemelin and Blangy (2009) articulate the debate quite well and settle on the use of Aboriginal, given the legal use of the term, also pointing to its prevalence in the Canadian context. As such, Aboriginal tourism, as a subset of cultural tourism, "refers to tourism in which Aboriginal people are directly involved in the provision of the attraction, either through control and/or by having their culture serve as the essence of the attraction" (Hinch & Butler, 1996: 9). In the context of this paper, the Aboriginal community involved in the project self-identify as Mi'kmaw or L'nu'k. The community of Eskasoni is one of 25 federally recognized Aboriginal communities in Atlantic Canada.

Development of community based tourism products can create new sources of employment and income, help to diversify economies, increase awareness of valuable local resources, and increase opportunities to learn about and from local cultures and histories. In referencing Colton and Harris' (2007) work, Lynch, Duinker, Sheehan, and Chute (2010: 540) state that "in the context of Mi'kmaw cultural tourism, properly developed community based tourism that allows community members to be directly involved in decision-making is essential to its success and sustainability." It is this point that launched the current study; it also represents a shift away from an approach that is solely focused on job creation to one that fosters nation-building and the sustainability of the community. Although sometimes thought of as inherently sustainable, community based tourism is not necessarily a sustain-

able solution. There are risks when dealing with cultural tourism and community-based tourism other than economic viability, ecological impacts, and the social impacts to participants directly involved in the activity. The model of community ownership and the extent to which consultation is reflective of community desires must also be considered thoroughly in order to encourage long term social support (Rozemeijer, 2001: 15).

Triple Bottom Line Dimension: Social

Indigenous tourism is a growing market segment within the tourism sector worldwide (Notzke, 2006). Indigenous cultures have become a powerful attraction at many levels: for tourists themselves, entrepreneurs, government agencies, and academia (Butler & Hinch, 2007). In equal measure, cultural tourism, particularly CBT, is popular because it can also play an important role in community social development for Indigenous communities. As identified by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (2001) and also academic scholars (see Manyara & Jones, 2007), CBT when grounded in culture can substantially empower communities and make tremendous headway in the areas of development and poverty reduction.

MacDonald (2000) recognizes social values as central to successful community-based development projects. These values are embedded in such concepts as cooperation, unity, democracy, the family, the circle, and oral tradition. She showcases such in relation to the Bear River Medicine Trail in mainland Nova Scotia. Similarly, Bell (1999, 2000) has outlined a 4 Cs model, consisting of community economic development, community empowerment, community wellness, and community learning. Bell's (1999) explanations highlight the centrality of the social or community element where empowerment includes aspects such as governance and community control that are similar to those values related to democracy and consensus. Wellness includes health across physical, mental, social, and spiritual planes, and it also refers to someone's ability to develop a sense of identity through engagement with traditional cultures. Learning refers to both the land as a classroom and acquiring wisdom from elders and others. For the purpose of our analysis, Bell's schematic is useful in that it also refers to community economic development, including job development and partnerships, which complement the triple bottom line approach. It has also been used by Colton and Harris (2007) to examine development in the Mi'kmaw community of Lennox Island. They concluded that community economic development through tourism development activities can offer communities a position for success and capacity in the future, important drivers within sustainability.

Triple Bottom Line Dimension: Environment

Some Aboriginal communities consider themselves to be environmental stewards of the land (ATAC, 2015: 135). Tourists expect an Aboriginal tourism experience to provide an interpretation of nature and landscape from an Indigenous point of view (Carr, 2004), and Zorilla Martinez (2003) posits that tourists participating in Aboriginal tourism activities are seeking experiences that offer a way to connect with nature through Aboriginal people. Consequently, some may also draw the conclusion that Aboriginal tourism products are more environmentally friendly than competitors, and they may be right to do so. Lynch et al. (2010) identify Mi'kmaw cultural tourism, using a community-based approach, as contingent on certain belief systems, notably the Mi'kmaw worldview of interconnectedness; the

Mi'kmaw perception of land, time, and space; and the Mi'kmaw concept of *Netukulimk* (which can be thought of as environmental sustainability).[2] However, because of the interconnectedness, we cannot discuss one dimension of tourism development without considering the relationships to other dimensions.

As stated earlier, when people think about sustainable tourism they often think of the "green" tourism or the environmental impact of tourism first. Therefore, within the tourism industry there are a wide array of standards and certifications that appear to measure environmental impact, but they are not easily comparable with one another (Strick & Fenich, 2014). Many tourism products are promoted as environmentally friendly and charge a premium because they are deemed to be more environmentally friendly than others. However, in reviewing Mi'kmaw tourism products, it does not appear that any of them have chosen to apply for recognition from industry groups that offer standard certification.

Triple Bottom Line Dimension: Economic

Lynch et al. (2011: 978) indicate that an "inventory of existing Mi'kmaw cultural tourism activities points to the sector's infancy." Mi'kmaw heritage and cultural interpretation centres, largely funded by government sources, are the primary means through which Mi'kmaw culture is shared with tourists in the province. They make note of three such centres: the Bear River Heritage and Cultural Centre (established in 2003) in Bear River First Nation; the Glooscap Heritage Centre (established in 2006), located near Truro and run by the Millbrook First Nation; and the Wagmatcook Heritage and Cultural Centre (established in 2001) in Wagmatcook First Nation on CBI. Another, the Membertou Heritage Park (established in 2012), has since opened in Membertou, CBI (see Doucette, 2008; Membertou Heritage Park, 2015). These centres present valuable information on past and present aspects of Mi'kmaw life. Many of these centres offer hands-on experiential workshops, such as drum making, to showcase and offer a unique experience to visitors and enhance their understanding of Mi'kmaw culture. There are fewer opportunities for visitors or non-Mi'kmaw locals to "get out on the land" or to holistically interact with the Elders. In the example of Membertou, the Elders were very enthusiastic about developing a cultural heritage site, but many were concerned it would become an economic drain to the community rather than an economic driver (Doucette, 2008).

Tourists (and non-Mi'kmaw locals) may also experience Mi'kmaw culture through events such as Treaty Day, in October, or at gatherings and feasts, known as *mawio'mi*. In the summer months, a powwow trail exists, offering many opportunities to visit community after community throughout the Maritimes (Lynch et al., 2011). There are a few Mi'kmaw ecotourism experiences in Kejimkujik National Park and National Historic Site (Lynch et al., 2011), which assist with showcasing Mi'kmaw culture "on the land." All of this additional activity directly creates employment opportunities for community members, through increased demand for specialized tours, tour packages, and craft products. It also creates spin-off effects for other industry sectors, such as transportation and food and beverage. The economic impacts of the cultural tourism industry were the very reason that CBI invested in

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[2] Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources (UINR) website, "At the soul of everything we do at UINR is Netukulimk", http://www.uinr.ca/programs/netukulimk/

the development of cultural tourism products in the early 1980s. However, the environmental impact of this increased activity has yet to be formally studied or measured.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION

To better understand the development of ECJ, it was determined that semi-structured qualitative interviews with key participants who had been involved in the project would provide insight into how and why decisions were made and what factors were considered. The research team devised a list of research participant categories based upon those who might be able to provide valuable data regarding the development of ECJ. It was publicly known that the ECJ project had received funding and support for development, so the partners were easily identified through news releases and advertising material. Further, as this research was a collaborative initiative with the community, a key player in the development of ECJ — Tracy Menge — was a member of the research team and provided input on key informants for the study. This initial list included a number of stakeholders: Elders, employees (past and present), officials at various levels of government, consultants involved in the development and marketing of the product over time, and other partner agencies. The identified individuals were invited to participate in the research project, with eight interviews conducted over a 3-month period in 2015. This approach was key for our research purposes, as we wanted to investigate the decisions made in the development of ECJ and how these might impact its sustainability as a community economic development initiative over time. It was not the purpose of this study to engage in random sampling of tourists who visit the site in order to interrogate their experiences or perceptions (though this would make for a valuable follow-up study).

Although all research participants were asked the same suite of questions, which addressed their role in the development, the challenges and successes they perceived, the timeline of development, and their hopes for the future, participants were also free to speak on any tangential lines of thought. This approach was used to avoid leading the discussion in certain directions and, instead, to let the discussion naturally emerge through dialogue. Additional directed questions were asked of partner organizations and past/present employees. Interviews typically lasted between 40 and 60 minutes and (with consent) were recorded so that they could be later deposited in the Mi'kmaq Resource Centre at Cape Breton University. As part of the participant consent process, the research was explained to interviewees. Community ethical protocols encourage researchers to show respect for community held knowledge by acknowledging Elders and sharing community stories. Respecting individual rights, participants were given the option to choose whether and how they would be identified in publication; anyone directly quoted has given explicit written permission to do so.

THE SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES OF ECJ

The research interviews revealed some common themes in the successes and challenges of establishing the ECJ tourism product. Depending on their role in the project, some research participants observed additional challenges that may not be immediately visible to everyone and at the same time were able to celebrate the ongoing successes. These are highlighted and discussed below.

Ethics and Authenticity

The indicators of authenticity highlighted earlier included direct involvement of Aboriginal community members in ownership and/or delivery of a product (Williams & O'Neil, 2007; Lynch, 2010). From that perspective, ECJ is authentic because it is owned and operated by community members. A second indicator of authenticity was the extent to which the product was a community-driven initiative, reflective of the desires of the community as a whole (Rozemeijer, 2001). This emerged as a challenge through the research. There was recognition of the need to find a balance between an authentic cultural experience and the "staged" presentation of culture. As the consultant on the project noted, ECJ does not want to present "Hollywood Indians", but real experiences based in community culture (Carroll, personal communication, March 23, 2015). Of course, there is significant debate within the community about what elements should or should not be featured as part of ECJ. For example, along the trail on Goat Island, one of the interpretive nodes features a Plains-style tipi. Some community members feel that it should be a *wi'kuom*, which is one of the traditional dwellings of the Mi'kmaq. Similarly, some interpreters and community members want signage to be in Mi'kmaq instead of English; but for practical reasons, English is necessary.

The Elders look at this project as more than an opportunity for jobs and revenue, but as an opportunity to teach the youth and leave a legacy of knowledge, culture, and history for future generations. Through their involvement in the project, they realized the wealth of knowledge they have and how important it is to share their knowledge with others, both community members and tourists. That realization has increased their desire to share their stories and history, and take more pride in their culture (Elders, personal communications, April 8, 2015). As Sandra MacDonald, one of the consultants working on the project, observed, the ECJ project highlights and showcases the culture and traditions of the Mi'kmaw people and "the pride in culture has inspired pride in others from the community" (personal communication, March 25, 2015). However, if the project is going to be ethically sustainable in the long term, future development will need to include individuals with tourism expertise and a desire to include mentoring in their roles and responsibilities. The human resources challenges, discussed by participants, of finding appropriately trained individuals who are both interested in working at ECJ in front-line positions and motivated to take on leadership roles may also be an indicator of whether or not the ECJ project is sufficiently reflective of community desires. In many cases, there is a lack of qualified and experienced individuals to take on important roles. However, it takes away from the authenticity of the Aboriginal tourism product to recruit from outside the Mi'kmaw community when the project is meant to showcase Mi'kmaw culture and be a community-led initiative.

Aside from encouraging school groups to visit ECJ, there is little evidence that the Elders are working on ways to engage community youth in the project and seeking ways to get them involved. Local youth are exposed to language, traditions, and culture in other ways in the community, but there are few specific initiatives building on youth engagement led by ECJ. Past efforts to train youth as heritage interpreters have not had the anticipated results (Carroll, personal communication, March 23, 2015). More recently, ECJ has begun pairing youth with Elders to be mentored in an apprentice-type relationship for traditional crafts; however, thus far only one youth has been mentored in this fashion. While the results of the initiative are not yet known, for ECJ to be sustainable the community's youth will need to enhance their knowledge of traditional crafts, food, language, dance, and song, as well as heritage interpretation practices.

In addition, the Elders directly involved in the project and those in the community with a wealth of knowledge of Mi'kmaw culture, history, and traditions are an aging population. Given this, succession planning will be critical to ensure there are enthusiastic, knowledgeable and capable community members to take over the roles and responsibilities of the Elders moving forward. In the meantime, there may be an opportunity to recruit appropriately skilled employees of Mi'kmaw heritage from outside Eskasoni. Even that may be problematic if enough Eskasoni residents, including Elders involved in the ECJ project, feel that type of action is a threat to authenticity because there are cultural differences throughout Mi'kma'ki.

Triple Bottom Line: Social

One of the critical success factors of a sustainable tourism project is ensuring the host community is involved with, supports, and benefits from the project in the short and long term. The various social benefits described in the literature included wellness (physical, mental, and spiritual) and empowerment through self-governance and community control (Bell, 1999). It was said that these social benefits would be more likely if values of cooperation, unity, democracy, family, and oral tradition were part of the process (MacDonald, 2000).

In the case of ECJ, some social successes are evident. The Elders who have been working on the project shared that they have learned critical professional skills, and gained confidence and self-esteem (Elders, personal communications, April 8, 2015). The external consultant working on the project, who has been a key contributor to the project's development, management, and training of staff, has witnessed first-hand this capacity building and enhancement in the Elders (Carroll, personal communication, March 23, 2015). The Elders also see social benefit in raising awareness about Mi'kmaw culture and history in the local community of Cape Breton. One of the hired coordinators, who is not from Eskasoni, shared that she is grateful for her own increased awareness about the Mi'kmaw community. She said she has developed a tremendous amount of respect for the Elders with whom she works (MacDonald, personal communication, March 25, 2015). There are some challenges with engaging the community to its fullest potential. At this time, there is little balance in community members taking full ownership and leadership of ECJ, thus forcing a disconnection between local residents and potential partnerships from outside the immediate community.

The desire to engage more community members in operations and administration was expressed as a possible threat to authentic product delivery. Social involvement and support from the community creates a similar level of concern. The walking trails at Goat Island are maintained and available for use by the community and general public. This contributes to the overall wellness of the community because it provides another activity in support of a healthy lifestyle at no cost to residents. Yet, there are also varying degrees of support among community members for the project. Complex social dynamics, related to close personal and family relationships, are common in small communities. One of the ECJ project consultants stated that working with the social dynamics of Eskasoni as such a "tight knit" community was tricky for her because she was not familiar with the history of personal and family relationships within the community and how they may or may not impact the ECJ project (MacDonald, personal communication, March 25, 2015). Some members do not support the project, but it is unclear whether that is due to political reasons, lack of interest, or a lack of

understanding of the value and impact a tourism initiative can have on the community from economic, social, cultural, and environmental perspectives.

Triple Bottom Line: Environmental

Goat Island is located on the coastline of the Bras d'Or Lake, an estuary where fresh and salt waters mix and one of the world's 580 designated UNESCO Biosphere Reserves. The Mi'kmaq were the first to travel and live around the Bras d'Or Lake and called it *Petoo'bok*, which means "a long dish of salt water." The uniqueness of this body of water and the flora and fauna that live there was recognized by UNESCO and it was identified as "a special place where people live in harmony with nature" (DCBA, 2014). This designation and the Mi'kmaw people's respect for and spiritual connection to the land should instill the mindset that the environment in which ECJ operates should be preserved to its fullest; however, the environment and the need to protect and preserve it was not directly addressed by interview participants.

Other than relating that Goat Island is being used by community members, there was little discussion of environmental dimension of sustainability. Many organizations engaged in Aboriginal tourism development in Canada suggest that there are unique opportunities for products connected to the environment because Aboriginal people tend to self-identify as stewards of the land (ATAC, 2015). However, through the interviews we conducted, participants did not make reference to any kind of responsibility or stewardship of the land. It should be noted that during interviews, we asked broad questions about sustainability, allowing each participant to interpret sustainability for themselves. Without a prompt specifically related to the environmental dimension, there was no explicit discussion of it. Carr (2004) has suggested that environmental sustainability is connected to interpretation of the environment from an Indigenous point of view. It is possible that interviewees interpret sustainability differently and the concept of *Netukulimk*, interconnectedness of all things, was understood or implied, but not explicitly discussed.

That said, the environmental impact from the project appears to be low; when visitors arrive they walk the trail system, as do many of the interpreters. There is only one permanent structure on site, the trails are graded gravel, and seating along the trails are wooden picnic tables. There is the hope that this project will bring awareness of the need to protect Goat Island to ensure it is available for future generations. There is no evidence that a formal environmental impact study has been conducted in relation to the present development or future initiatives yet; however, as the popularity of ECJ grows and more and more tourists visit the site and the broader community, issues of environmental sustainability will need to be considered more thoroughly.

Triple Bottom Line: Economic

The economic dimension of sustainability can be complex as well. The economic benefits of the project and the financial challenges were discussed in a number of interviews. The organizers saw an opportunity to develop tourism products that would complement other businesses in the region, fill a gap in the experiences visitors want, and be competitive in the industry. Eskasoni leadership saw the opportunity to train community members for new careers and create jobs. It appears that all of those goals have been met, and there is potential to continue to expand in the future.

Based on the research interviews and documentation, ECJ's primary revenue stream has been group tours (cruise ships, schools, and conferences). ECJ employs two full-time staff, ten full-time seasonal workers, and two part-time seasonal workers. There are also fifteen volunteers who contribute to various initiatives throughout the year (Menge, personal communication, July 20, 2015). This project, then, is a source of employment and revenue for the community. As a result of this initiative, there have been partnerships formed within the community, region, and province. The early indicators of ECJ's growth potential to date has spurred collaboration and partnership, resulting in the formation of the Unama'ki Tourism Association[3], which has a mandate to develop and promote Mi'kmaw tourism products in Cape Breton (Carroll, personal communication, March 23, 2015). Those involved in the project, coordinators and staff, are proud of the success to date and feel there is significant opportunity to continue to further develop the offerings to meet the desires of tourists.

From the beginning, the desire to complement other CBI tourism products rather than compete with them was evident in the partnership with the Highland Village Museum. The executive director of Highland Village Museum explained that there needs to be additional tourism products and services in place to keep visitors in the area longer and spending more money. Chaisson spoke of the need to develop a "critical mass" of tourism products and services (personal communication, April 22, 2015). This demonstrates a desire to ensure economic benefits for the region, rather than only one community. The Highland Village Museum and ECJ can be viewed as "anchor tenants" (main reasons for visitors to visit Central Cape Breton); however, additional complementary services must continue to be developed.

The partnership and collaboration with the Highland Village Museum has been described as a "cross-cultural exchange that is mutually beneficial to both Highland Village and Eskasoni" (Chaisson, personal communication, April 22, 2015). The two sites showcase distinctly different cultures, but partner to show the relationship between the Gaels and Mi'kmaq. They are similar in that the type of experience they provide focuses on first-person interpretation, hands-on cultural workshops, stories of the past, and the relationship to place. At the same time, ECJ's model of land-based learning, which showcases Mi'kmaw culture in a multifaceted way, is quite a unique and a welcome addition to the cultural tourism stage. The model stands out because there is a lack of market-ready Aboriginal tourism products across Cape Breton, and in Canada. Developing this viable niche market would lead to direct and indirect economic benefits for the Mi'kmaw communities and all Cape Breton Island.

There have been discussions within the leadership of Eskasoni for future development of Goat Island and the ECJ experience. They are also optimistic that there will be future economic spinoffs, primarily through the creation of additional businesses and services, as community members see the success of ECJ (Denny, personal communication, May 27, 2015). Indeed, this has already started with the recent addition of the Goat Island View Café on Shore Road in Eskasoni. This optimism is supported by the multi-phase approach and the artistic renderings that were created to reflect the long term vision of what can be created. These artistic renderings, which were shared with funding partners as well as publicly at community gatherings, are intended to help others see there is a long term vision. One

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[3] As of 2018, the Unama'ki Tourism Association is no longer formally operational. However, the communities continue to work together informally.

showed the trails and fishing boats, now a reality, as well as other expansions, such as a visitors' centre, additional support for water activities, a seafood restaurant, and a lodge where guests can stay overnight (Elders, personal communications, April 8, 2015). Initially there were no bathrooms on site for guests, an identified weakness, but everyone knew they would be part of the next development phase, as would be the interpretation centre (Elders, personal communications, April 8, 2015).

With sustainable tourism-related businesses, it is critical to think past the economic benefits and factor in economic challenges together with the positive and negative social, environmental, and cultural impacts of the business. However, this research identified a number of economic concerns that should not be overlooked. During the first full year of operation, there wasn't a significant, stable source of leisure visitors, which tends to lead to an unsustainable "boom and bust" model for business. There also was no evidence of a strong system in place for tracking visitor statistics or formalized post-experience evaluations to collect feedback from and information on visitors. This type of system could be critical for establishing a quality assurance program that could strengthen applications for additional government funding for new programs, equipment, marketing, job creation, or operations. At the same time, there is an overdependence on government funding; indeed, the Chief stated that the project would cease to exist if government funding was omitted (Denny, personal communication, May 27, 2015). Dependency on government support is common in the heritage and culture industry as governments strategically invest in programs and infrastructure that drive other programs. However, a model that is economically self-sustaining would certainly be preferred by Eskasoni leadership, who may feel obligated to step in if other public funding were to decrease. This demonstrates that the business will have to work towards a more stable financial model that can be enhanced by government funding, rather than depending on it for operations and management.

CONCLUSIONS

To date, ECJ has been the most successful attempt at tourism development in Eskasoni First Nation. Thanks to key partnerships and collaboration, support from Chief and Council, leadership and guidance from external consultants, and pride and enthusiasm from Elders, this project is beginning to realize some successes. ECJ demonstrates many promising practices when evaluated against the three dimensions of triple bottom line sustainability — economic, social, and environmental. Of equal or greater importance, the project leaders and Elders have been thinking about and discussing ethical issues and concerns around authenticity. Those discussions can be difficult, but the participants' willingness and desire to work through them together is evidence of a project that is grounded in shared values of cooperation and democracy, which were identified as critical social indicators of success (Bell 1999; MacDonald 2000). It has become very clear that there is significant enthusiasm around the future development of ECJ from all research participants. Those involved in ECJ have intentionally continued to improve and focus on the quality of its current product to ensure that both tourists and community members have a good experience. If that approach continues, it can be positioned to enjoy success and further development in the long term by addressing the challenges presented and taking future recommendations into account.

This case study also adds to the growing body of research on Aboriginal cultural tourism offerings in Canada. Further, the approach employed stands as a practical example of

CBT and the complexity inherent in the concept of sustainability. The ECJ model — which is grassroots in nature; engages Elders in decision-making and as interpreters/animators of the site; takes a phased, incremental approach to development; and establishes mutually beneficial partnerships to ensure community and regional benefits — is one that may be replicated in other communities and lead to similar success.

Acknowledgements

Note

This project upheld the ethical principles outlined by the Cape Breton University Research Ethics Board (File No: 1415-097) and Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch, the oversight board for any research conducted with and/or among Mi'kmaw people across Mi'kma'ki. Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch is run through Unama'ki College at Cape Breton University.

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