

Park Management, Tourism and Indigenous People

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Rec date: Sep 27, 2014; Acc date: Oct 06, 2014; Pub date: Oct 13, 2014

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Park Management and Regional Development

Despite decades of international efforts towards involving indigenous and traditional peoples in protected area management, there are few successful examples [1]. This seems to be even clearer in multifunctional protected areas, where in some cases the social and cultural dimension of sustainable development can be even more valued than the economic or the environmental dimensions. Therefore, the paradigm that conceived protected areas essentially as instruments for environmental conservation is being somehow replaced, at least in Europe, by the idea that protected areas are primarily instruments for the integration of environmental conservation with regional and local (economic) development [2]. An evolution of this type has also occurred with Australia's parks.

In recent years, the practice of Indigenous protected area (IPA) has been welcomed by more and more Indigenous committees in Australia. An IPA is an area over which the Indigenous traditional owners have entered into a voluntary agreement to promote biodiversity and conserve cultural resources in line with international standards. Indigenous people are actively involved in park management through IPAs and Indigenous co-managed parks. These parks are important parts of Australian national reserve system (NRS), which take more than 50% of total NRS area coverage [3]. Although it is debatable whether the establishment of protected areas will significantly contribute/accelerate the regional development of local Indigenous communities and local areas, compared with the rest of the NRS, IPAs and co-managed parks are more likely to be managed with concurrent regional development and community engagement elements. In these parks, it is a priority and a lease obligation to enhance Indigenous employment and business opportunities. There is probably some potential to join Indigenous communities' IPA activities with other economic development activities to get further benefit from applying Indigenous traditional culture and customary use of natural resources for their economic benefit. A 2006 evaluation by Gilligan concluded that IPAs successfully delivered improved social outcomes in regional development, such as 95% of IPA communities reported enhanced economic participation and development benefits from involvement with the program [4].

Indigenous Participation in Park Tourism

Tourism can be an effective tool for the conservation and management of protected areas [5]. Well-managed tourism can generate the financial and political support needed to sustain the values of protected areas. It can also increase understanding of our reserves and their environmental and cultural values, and contribute to enriching visitor experiences.

While the development of tourism particularly nature-based tourism coincides with the park management principles, tourism is

worldwide accepted as an effective way to accelerate regional development and reduce local poverty if effectively managed. In many rich countries including Australia, the gap in wellbeing between indigenous and non-indigenous emerges through process of development, and become clear and substantial at some stage [6]. Australian Indigenous people suffer significant disadvantages in their wellbeing, compared with non-Indigenous people. Hunter [7] showed that around 40% of the Indigenous population living in remote and very remote Australia – about 50,000 people – had incomes below the Australian poverty line. Although this population is only around 0.2% of the Australian population, they reside in about 1,200 small geographically dispersed communities, over a huge area that covers about 20 per cent of the Australian continent where most IPAs are located [8].

In Australia, each year about 80 million people visit national parks and marine parks. Visits continue to grow as more people are motivated by 'the enjoyment and experience of nature'. Parks represent the greatest tourism assets in Australia – over 40% of all international visits take in a national park [9]. National parks are also a conduit to the development of regional areas. Tourism expenditure as part of a park visit or expedition provides vital support for regional economies [10]. Nationally, the nature-based tourism sector contributes \$23 billion to the Australian economy each year. In 2009, there were 3.3 million international nature visitors to Australia – 64 per cent of all international visitors to Australia [11]. Indigenous tourism is a key element of Australian protected area estate's existing and potential tourism offer. In Australia, Indigenous tourism is recognized in the National long-term tourism strategy as important to the Australian tourism industry's competitiveness and to economic development for Indigenous Australians [12]. Recently Australian Northern Territory Government has called an Expression of Interest on the participation in tourism development in parks [13]. This is a sign showing a stronger governmental support to park tourism will put in place.

Indigenous Knowledge and Park Tourism

Indigenous people possess valuable traditional environmental/ecological knowledge through interacting with their proximate ecosystem. Typically, these indigenous people have their own experience and knowledge of how to exploit surrounding ecological resources. The value of Indigenous knowledge is yet to be fully utilized in the implementation of sustainable development policies. Unfortunately, policies for conserving and restoring ecological sites often ignore, or only cursorily incorporate, local Indigenous people's skills and traditional conservation techniques (such as with the use of fire, cf Gammage) [14]. Too often indigenous people are mainly seen as subsidized labour. The efforts to integrate Indigenous knowledge into mainstream natural resource management and tourism development and management would contribute to combining and coordinating the

environmental conservation and regional development, as well as social and wellbeing inclusion. Indigenous tourism based on Indigenous cultural knowledge is a possible option for such engagement and involvement. This option must be handled with some caution. Indigenous tourism in central Australia has recently declined because governments “overloaded” Indigenous tourism organizations or facilities with extra roles, such as community or economic development [15].

A successful IPA supposedly brings together traditional Indigenous knowledge and modern science for effective land management and environmental conservation. Tourism development provides a pathway for local communities such as Indigenous people to be involved deeply by sharing their traditional local knowledge.

Discussion

Tourism development is a strategic choice for the effective management of parks especially in those where local communities including Indigenous people living in. Indigenous participation in park tourism seems a good option for Indigenous people's involvement in park management and regional development. However, a lot of issues remain to be addressed. These issues include such as appropriate participation mechanism, pro-Indigenous policies, capacity buildings and park management zonation and planning. However, a functional framework or approach to integrated environmental conservation, regional development and local participation seems more urgent.

The Biosphere Reserve is an internationally recognized concept that specially deals with the potential conflicts between regional development and environmental conservation at a large scale of protected areas landscapes. Under the Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB) of The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), there is a World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR). Composed of 631 biosphere reserves in 119 countries, the WNBR of the MAB Programme represents a unique tool for international co-operation through sharing knowledge, exchanging experiences, building capacity and promoting best practices Biosphere reserves harmonize conservation of biological and cultural diversity, and economic and social development, through partnerships between people and nature [16]. In practice, biosphere reserves harmonize conservation of biological and cultural diversity, and economic and social development, through partnerships between people and nature [17]. Tourism development in reserves has been advocated by the WNBR and successfully practiced in many countries. There is the potential to apply the concept of Biosphere Reserve to IPAs and co-managed parks so link these parks to regional development, including monetizing public access and understanding of Indigenous culture and biodiversity conservation on Indigenous lands.

The authors propose that, generally, a better way for Indigenous Australian to actively participate in environmental management and

regional development is through their indirect participation in this management. Similarly indirect participation in economic exploitation and business operations is preferred, given that the general lack of Indigenous governance and managerial capacity, their lower empowerment and limited human capital in commercial activities have been some of important inhibitors to driving Indigenous economic development in Australia [18]. However, Indigenous traditional knowledge and their ownership of Indigenous lands would support them to contributing to park management and regional development including tourism development in parks, thus to sharing the significant benefits of integrated land management in national land management and environmental conservation strategies.

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