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Indigenous involvement and benefits from tourism in protected areas: a study of Purnululu National Park and Warmun Community, Australia

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Abstract

For many protected areas, sharing benefits with local indigenous communities is an important management requirement. This paper explores indigenous involvement in and benefits from tourism, using a study of Australia's World Heritage-listed Purnululu National Park and the nearby Warmun Aboriginal Community. Interactions between the Community, the Park and tourism were explored using semi-structured interviews. The results illuminate an ongoing cultural connection to the Park providing indigenous people with intrinsic, non-financial benefits. Significant financial benefits are possible through art sales to tourists but are currently limited. Physical difficulties in visiting the Park, issues related to skills, resources and motivation, and problems with joint management all contribute to this limited benefit accrual, as well as fostering a sense of separation from the Park. The findings have broader relevance to efforts elsewhere to engage indigenous people in meaningful ways in the benefits accruable from protected areas and associated tourism. Identifying and further enhancing intrinsic benefits and addressing perceptions of separation are promising areas for

attention as part of efforts to progress sustainable tourism. The paper also raises the important fact that some indigenous people may not wish to engage in tourism and that underengagement may be a part of the achievement of sustainable tourism.

Keywords: Indigenous, perceived separation, protected area, Purnululu National Park, tourism benefits, tourism impacts, Purnululu

Introduction

Communities adjacent to or closely associated with protected areas are increasingly realising benefits from tourism in these areas (Eagles & McCool, 2002; Wall & Mathieson, 2006). These benefits centre on tangible economic and employment opportunities (Mill & Morrison, 2006), as well as on the use of natural resources, shared decision-making and involvement in park or tourism management (Scherl & Edwards, 2007). For indigenous people, the maintenance of cultural traditions, biodiversity conservation and protection of spiritual sites may also be important benefits (Nurse-Bray & Rist, 2009; Smith, Scherrer, & Dowling, 2009). Delivery of such benefits can positively influence local perceptions of a protected area and its tourism (Brockington, Duffy, & Igoe, 2008; Figgis & Bushell, 2007).

A pursuit of benefit-sharing is not, however, a panacea for gaining local support nor is it without complications. A central complication is that negative impacts exist alongside benefits for local communities (Wall & Mathieson, 2006). These negative impacts are often overlooked in policy and practice (Brockington et al., 2008). Also, significant benefits are rarely delivered across a wide social scale (Simpson, 2009). Typically, those people with the

required education, skills or money to engage (e.g. Tosun, 2000; Trau & Bushell, 2008) receive the majority of benefits.

For indigenous people more specifically, benefit-sharing approaches often fail to deliver desired outcomes on the grounds that, for many, tourism remains a foreign activity (Brockington et al., 2008). This is certainly true in countries such as Australia where indigenous involvement in tourism is relatively recent (Dyer, Aberdeen, & Schuler, 2003). This relative novelty and growing indigenous involvement in conservation management calls for investigation to ensure the delivery of practical, locally meaningful benefits (Ross et al., 2009) for communities. The influence of cultural context on local attitudes and perceptions of benefit (Scambray, 2009) is a further and related consideration in this regard.

Another element of benefit-sharing relevant to indigenous people is involvement in park and tourism management. Worldwide, increasing numbers of national parks are being jointly managed by the Government (either State or national) and indigenous people (Bauman & Smyth, 2007). Well-known examples described in the international literature include Uluru, Kakadu and Garig Gunak Barlu National Parks in Australia. Joint or co-management involves the interaction of various parties, usually government conservation agencies and indigenous groups, within a management body holding decision-making authority, responsibility and accountability (Wearing & Huyskens, 2001).

Australia's extensive protected area network (10.5% of its terrestrial area; IUCN & UNEP, 2009) and the overlapping interests of indigenous people in retaining and building their connections to the land provide an ideal setting to analyse the potential benefits to these people from tourism. Despite a history of dispossession from their traditional lands, many indigenous Australians have maintained ongoing relationships with "country", the physical and spiritual landscape. Country provides the basis for indigenous identity (Doohan, 2008)

and embodies familial, spiritual and cultural values. More than 20% of the Australian continent is now under indigenous tenure (Altman, Buchanan, & Larsen, 2007), offering indigenous people opportunities for involvement and benefit from conservation and land management, as well as the tourism industry.

Gaining a better understanding of the nature and level of indigenous engagement in protected area tourism and their attitudes underpins realisation of the widely touted benefits. This paper reports on a study of the iconic World Heritage-listed Purnululu National Park and the adjacent Warmun Community (mostly indigenous), Park managers and tourism operators. Purnululu National Park (Purnululu), in the East Kimberley region of north-western Australia (Figure 1), is another example of an Australian jointly managed protected area. The objective of this study was to gain an understanding of local attitudes and perceptions of benefits associated with Purnululu National Park and its tourism, as well as the factors influencing indigenous involvement. This paper adds to the growing re-appraisal of the relationships between indigenous people, tourism and protected areas (see Buultjens, Gale, & White, 2010; Fuller, Buultjens, & Cummings, 2005; Pickerill, 2009; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2010).

Study methods

Purnululu National Park, its tourism and the nearby Warmun Aboriginal Community provided the case study. A case study research approach facilitated the detailed investigation of local experiences within their real-life context (Yin, 2009). Repeat semi-structured interviewing was the main form of data collection, providing most of the descriptions and analyses for this paper. Analysis of archival and more recent published and unpublished data relating to Purnululu, associated tourism activities and Warmun Community, and participant observation by the first author provided important additional contextual information. In 2008,

the first author spent three months in Warmun and Purnululu undertaking interviews and participant observation.

A total of 23 respondents, purposively targeted on the basis of their assumed knowledge of the Park, its tourism and/or Warmun Community and its associated outstations, took part in the study. Respondents included 10 indigenous and two non-indigenous people from the Warmun community, four Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) and five other state government employees and two tourism operators. Chain referral was used, with existing respondents suggesting other people of potential interest to the research (Babbie, 2007). Indigenous customary law provided a further consideration in the selection of respondents. According to this law, people who are not traditional owners have no clear authority to speak for the country (Doohan, 2008). This reality limited the number of indigenous respondents to those with cultural authority to participate in the research.

Case-specific document analysis helped to guide lines of questioning. Documents included archival material relating to Warmun and cultural ecology from the National Native Title Tribunal and Kimberley Land Council, together with more recent sources of information on Purnululu and its tourism. In addition, the wider national and international literature on interactions between protected areas, tourism and local communities was extensively consulted. Interview questions were further guided by discussions with cultural ethnographers and anthropologists working in the Warmun area.

Interviews focused on eliciting benefits and negative impacts of the Park and tourism for Warmun, as well as on the factors influencing current and future interactions. Information was also sought on the equity in benefit distribution, interactions with tourists and perceptions of Community involvement in Park management and tourism operations. The researcher employed extensive probing to ensure adequate exploration of interview topics.

The use of repeat interviews aided thorough exploration of the interview topics, with individual respondents revisited over several weeks. Participant observation of interactions between Community members, tourists and Park officials formed another element of data collection, with researcher observations documented daily in a personal journal.

Most interviews were recorded. When this was not possible, comprehensive notes were taken. Transcripts were analysed using NVivo (QSR International, Doncaster, Victoria, Australia), a qualitative software program that helps organise transcripts of conversations into a reduced number of researcher-designated codes (Bazeley, 2007) reflecting patterns and ideas emerging from the data. These codes were refined through subsequent levels of analysis, drawing on themes originating from the initial document analysis. For instance, initial codes reflected frequently occurring concepts such as “jobs in Purnululu” or “connections to country”. These initial codes were refined to provide rich descriptions of phenomena such as “transmission of cultural knowledge” or “perceived separation”. Careful analysis and documenting of text associated with each code enabled this rich description. These higher level codes, influenced by case-specific as well as the broader literature, underpin the following results.

Results

Description of the Purnululu case study

The first component of the case study is Purnululu National Park and its management. This Park, with an area of 208,723 ha, was listed in the World Heritage for its natural values in 2003 (IUCN, 2003). It is located in the remote Kimberley region of Western Australia, 3000 km distant from this state's capital city, Perth. This region is one of the most sparsely

populated in the world, with 0.08 people/km² (KDC, n.d.). Purnululu National Park is 250 km south of the main regional centre of Kununurra and is only accessible by air or via Spring Creek Track, a 50 km long, unsealed entry track linking the Park to the Warmun community in the west. Navigating this entry track is challenging, requiring a high clearance four-wheel drive vehicle.

At the time of research, Purnululu was staffed locally by two park rangers working in a shared shift, aided by two indigenous assistant rangers working under government welfare schemes. Two seasonal personnel staffed Purnululu's visitor centre and two voluntary campground hosts managed the Park's public campsites. Tourism visitation to Purnululu is estimated to produce a further 46 direct and indirect jobs in the region (DEWHA, 2008).

Purnululu is managed by the DEC, the state government agency holding management responsibility for Western Australia's conservation lands and waters (DEC, 2009). This Department has long recognised indigenous connections to the Purnululu area. The Park's management plan stipulates indigenous involvement in management, as well as the accrual of benefits from Park tourism. Primarily, these benefits relate to employment and ownership of tourism businesses, as well as the presence of indigenous living leases.

Purnululu was the first park in Western Australia to make provision for indigenous traditional owners, “those people recognised as being traditionally associated with land within the Park” (CALM, 1995, p. ii), to live in Purnululu and maintain customs and practices. The leases were intended to better enable local indigenous communities to act on economic development opportunities available through park tourism. Indigenous involvement in Park management through joint management approaches, focusing on the Purnululu Park Council, provides a further example of efforts directed towards indigenous involvement and benefit. Inaugurated

in 2002, this Council is intended to provide indigenous people with “meaningful input” to the management of Purnululu (CALM, 1995, p. 53).

Indigenous involvement in Purnululu's management is complicated by two opposing claims of traditional ownership by different indigenous groups. Both the Djaru and Kija groups claim traditional ownership of lands encompassing Purnululu, signifying historical links to the country and the right to speak for an area, based on traditional laws and customs (Doohan,2008). At the time of research, only the Kija had a registered claim ¹ and as such was represented on the Park Council. Although Purnululu's original management plan specified representation of both Kija and Djaru interests in the Park Council pending settlement of traditional ownership, acrimonious relationships between the two groups have resulted in Djaru representatives withdrawing from the Council. This sole Kija representation conflicts with the Federal requirements for World Heritage properties listed under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999). This Act specifies that management of a World Heritage site should account for people with particular interest in or who may be affected by its management. For Purnululu, such people clearly include the Djaru.

Indigenous involvement in Park management is thus complicated on several levels. The first complication arises by pre-existing tensions between Djaru and Kija groups. Tensions also exist within the groups as to who can rightly claim traditional ownership. Conflicting requirements for consultation with indigenous people imposed by the State (Kija only) and Federal governments (requires both Kija and Djaru involvement) pose as the second complication. A third complication arises in the fact that current joint management arrangements do not accurately represent all Kija people claiming traditional ownership. DEC must consult with other Kija traditional owner claimants through the Kimberley Land Council, a regional indigenous representative body.

To compound this complexity, at the time of research, the Kimberley Land Council only represented Kija claims to the Purnululu area and was unsupportive of DEC liaison with Djaru traditional owners (Conservation Commission, 2008). These factors complicating indigenous involvement in Park management are pervasive, such that joint management as originally envisaged for the Park has not eventuated (Conservation Commission, 2008). Indigenous input into Park management remains limited, pending resolution of the dispute.

The Aboriginal community of Warmun and its associated outstations form the second component of the Purnululu case study. Warmun is Purnululu's closest sizeable settlement (Figure 1), and many Kija people with links to Purnululu live in the Community or one of its eight associated outstations, including members claiming traditional ownership over the Park and Park Council members. These factors made Warmun an ideal choice for investigation of interactions with, and benefits from, Park tourism.

Although Djaru people also hold rights and interests to the Purnululu area, they were not included in the research, owing to a focus on exploring the impacts of Park tourism on a geographically determined and bounded local community. This interest resulted in a focus on Warmun and, by default, Kija traditional owners residing there. This focus on Warmun and Kija residents does not imply a judgement on the validity of either Kija or Djaru claims of traditional ownership nor does it imply that Djaru people should be excluded from deriving benefits.

Warmun's usual population is around 300 people (ABS, 2006). It has a young population with 36% aged below 14 years and only 7.5% of the people older than 65 years. Some 22% of adults have never attended school, reflecting a wider trend of poor literacy and numeracy levels in the East Kimberley region (Taylor, 2003). The community is highly dependent on government welfare payments (Doohan, 2008). Most employment occurs as part of the

Federal Government's "work for welfare" Community Development Employment Project (CDEP), in which 144 residents participated in 2007 (Warmun Community, 2007). CDEP income varies; at the time of research, census data indicated an average fortnightly income of AUS \$380 (EUR 284). Welfare dependence is strongly related to Warmun's "very remote" location, signifying disadvantages such as very little accessibility of goods and services and few opportunities for social interaction (ABS, 1999).

Warmun Community Incorporated owns and operates the local Turkey Creek Roadhouse, which obtains tourist income by providing accommodation, meals and petrol. Non-tourists, for instance road workers and government personnel, also use these services. Income also comes from scenic helicopter flights to Purnululu departing from Warmun, from which the community receives an annual lease fee of approximately 15,000 AUD (EUR 11,300).

Individuals can also earn substantial income from producing and selling art through the Warmun Art Gallery, which produces an annual income in excess of 1 million AUD (754,000 EUR; Brereton et al., 2007). At the time of research, 55 community residents were producing art at the centre, much of which sells directly to galleries on Australia's east coast and overseas. The gallery retains 40% of sales profit (after tax) and 60% accrues to the artist.

The third component of the Purnululu case study is tourism associated with Purnululu National Park. Tourist arrivals have increased steadily over time, with 24,602 people visiting the Park in 2011 (DEC, 2012). Tourism infrastructure is minimal, comprising two public campsites and three more luxurious private safari camps run by licensed tour operators. Ground-based activities centre on seven walking trails of varying length. Commercial scenic flights over the Park are another popular activity. Scenic flights leave from within Purnululu itself as well as from Warmun, Kununurra and Halls Creek. Local indigenous people have little direct involvement in Park tourism apart from limited seasonal employment as ranger assistants.

Benefit-sharing, for example through employment opportunities and ownership of tourism businesses, is detailed in Park policies, including licence conditions for Purnululu's three private safari camps (DEC, 2009). Joint management and the Park Council offer a further opportunity for involvement, providing a means of integrating indigenous views and interests into Park and tourism management. These are deliberate attempts by Park managers to foster a policy environment conducive to benefit accrual for indigenous people. However, despite tourist visitation to Purnululu contributing 2.6 million AUD to regional businesses, after costs, and 1.7 million AUD in annual direct and indirect household income (1.96 million EUR and 1.28 million EUR, respectively; DEWHA, 2008), it is questionable how much economic benefit from tourism accrues to local indigenous people.

Interactions, attitudes and benefits from tourism

The in-depth interviews provided a rich, localised account of indigenous involvement and benefit from Park tourism. Interview excerpts are used to illustrate a number of emergent themes characterising interactions among local indigenous people, Purnululu and Park tourism. Themes explored here specifically relate to Park tourism and include cultural connections to the Purnululu area, difficulties visiting the Park, employment opportunities, involvement in joint management and perceptions of “separation” from Park tourism. Other themes arising from the research that do not directly relate to Park tourism, for instance, concerns regarding natural resources and the Park's role in social development, are not reported here.

A first theme states that cultural connections to the Purnululu landscape formed a central sociocultural link between indigenous respondents and the Park. One community member expressed the importance of these links as:

Traditional country ... culturally it gives people their identity, their family's identity, the connections, the stories, the beliefs ... country is very important ... helps to define you as a person and to an extent your lifestyle and our values. (Community member)

All respondents, including non-indigenous people, mentioned this intangible but significant benefit as a critical element of the relationship between indigenous people and the Park.

Indigenous respondents highlighted Purnululu's importance for maintaining and transmitting cultural knowledge to younger generations. Another aspect of cultural connection included spiritual fulfilment. Illustrative quotes follow.

Teach young people to work together, look after Dreamtime and the Park. This place woman not allowed to go, this place men not allowed to go. (Community member)

Got to think about the future, for the kids. For the [next] generation and generation, so they can know that Purnululu for the future. (Community member)

A second theme was difficulties experienced by indigenous people in physically visiting Purnululu. Although all community respondents had visited Purnululu on previous occasions, there was consensus that to actually do so was difficult. The need for a four-wheel drive vehicle was the main limitation. These access limitations were described as follows:

We got no motor car to go see [Purnululu]. (Community member)

[Purnululu is] inaccessible for people in Warmun. They don't – can't afford – big four-wheel drives and to wreck their car to go in there. It might be great for the baby boomer with his expensive car, but it's no good for your local trying to bash his Ford in there, he can't afford to wreck his tyres or whatever. (Community member)

Access difficulties were linked to perceptions of exclusion and separation from the Park, expressed by one community member as:

There's just no real connection to the Park, physically its separate, it's like an island.

(Community member)

Indigenous employment in Park and tourism operations was the third theme. Community respondents clearly recognised employment as offering opportunities to maintain cultural obligations and links to country:

Ranger[s] ... can get out to Purnululu and be on country. (Community member)

However, employment was very limited. At the time of field research, two indigenous staff, only one of whom was from the Warmun area, were employed in Park maintenance under CDEP. This CDEP employment no longer existed by early 2010; however, two permanent assistant indigenous ranger positions were in place, offering employment during Purnululu's tourism season (~March–November). No local indigenous people were employed by safari camp operators, despite this being a licence condition. Interviews with safari camp operators indicated difficulties in sourcing and retaining local indigenous employees.

A number of respondents, however, gained financial benefits from Park tourism through employment at the Turkey Creek Roadhouse (one non-indigenous respondent) and the production of artwork through the Warmun Art Gallery (four indigenous respondents).

Income from artwork was mentioned:

Every Tuesday [we get] money from paintings, at least \$100 ... We get money when we painting. (Community member)

Respondents highlighted a number of factors influencing the ability of indigenous people to become involved in and benefit from the Park and tourism. These included a general lack of requisite skills and education; lack of money to buy in/start up tourism businesses; and aspects relating to motivation. As respondents commented:

It takes a fair bit of experience, knowledge and intent to be able to be self-motivated ... perhaps there aren't those people in Warmun. (Community member)

The whole issue is, you've got to want to get up and do it ... it's there for the opening, like jobs at the Visitor Centre, but, you know, you've got to have the people that are interested, that's what it all boils down to. Got to have an interest in whatever the job is. (Community member)

Motivational factors appeared to hold the most resonance among community members.

Often, respondents drew links between these factors and the presence of welfare dependency:

There's not a lot of independent or self employed people out of Warmun, it's very much a welfare-dependent community. (Community member)

A fourth theme emerging from the research concerned joint management within Purnululu.

Respondents depicted joint management as contested, with tensions stemming from competing claims and uncertainties regarding traditional ownership over the Purnululu area.

Purnululu is a particular example of where the resolution of native title issues would have a big impact on not only our management of the Park but also the relationship of the Park to the people that live in the area. (Park staff)

Issues associated with cross-cultural communication were also evident.

It's going to have to take on more of a white man's meeting setup to get any outcomes. (Park staff)

We're working together, but [DEC] need to learn more things from our side.

Understand one another. We understand their side, but they got to understand our side as well, you know. (Community member)

A final theme was perceived “separation” of indigenous people from the Park and its tourism. The following quotes emphasise feelings of separation.

I think that any benefit is minimal ... because there is a lack of interaction between Purnululu and Warmun. (Park staff)

[Tourists] just go to the art centre, [I] not talk to them; they just drive through and out. (Community member)

This finding was surprising, given the strong cultural connections to the Purnululu area, the presence of indigenous living leases and opportunities for involvement and benefit. Perceived separation appeared related to a lack of interaction between indigenous people and tourists and the limited involvement of indigenous people in Park management. Difficulties associated with living lease occupancy, including a lack of lease infrastructure and economic base within Purnululu, were further contributing factors.

Discussion

These results illuminate the immediate costs and benefits for livelihoods, as perceived by local people. This prioritisation of local perspectives probably reflects the small scale of decision-making and institutions in many indigenous societies (Langton,2003). A common thread through these results is the perceived separation of indigenous people from the Park and its tourism. Persistent cultural connections can be juxtaposed against this perception.

Cultural connections to the Purnululu area

Indigenous cultural connections to the Purnululu area are a key component of the Purnululu case study. Kija people have a system of law – the Dreaming or *Ngarrangkani* – that guides

people in how to live their life and underpins governance, social and ecological responsibility and moral order. Connections to the country are maintained through the transmission of cultural knowledge (Doohan, 2008), for instance, by dancing, paintings and traditional ceremonies. This fundamental link between social and ecological realms was seen as central by all respondent groups, although explored here predominantly from an indigenous perspective.

In this study, cultural connections included an array of intrinsic values for indigenous respondents, with the transmission of cultural knowledge to younger generations seemingly paramount. The strength of these connections, and ongoing significance of conveying cultural knowledge, indicates the existence of a “rich indigenous cultural capital” (Doohan, 2008, p. 64), which broadly encompasses belief systems, connections to the country, local knowledge and traditional customs and practices.

This cultural connection to the landscape contributes to local stewardship, with indigenous respondents expressing a sense of custodial responsibility towards the Park, tourists and the landscape. Maintenance of connections to country and cultural sites, as well as protecting tourists from unseen spiritual dangers are part of this responsibility (Smith et al., 2009).

Recognising and valuing these fundamental cultural connections between indigenous people and the landscape represents an important challenge and aspiration for Park managers.

However, conflating these cultural connections with a desire to become involved in Park tourism is a major assumption, and one that can be misleading.

Difficulty of visiting the Park

Visiting the Park was difficult for indigenous people; they were only sporadic visitors and many had not visited the Park for several months. This was surprising given assumptions that locals would visit frequently due to “on country” trips for law or women's business, for fishing and hunting, or possibly for native title meetings. Most respondents identified the need for a four-wheel drive vehicle as the principal constraint. This finding is not unique. Brown (2009), for instance, identified issues of distance and affordability of both car ownership and travel as constraints to indigenous people visiting country. In this instance, this limitation perhaps reflects the high dependence on welfare payments in Warmun. This income, already low in comparison to standard Australian wages, is quickly consumed by the high costs of goods, services and transport associated with living in a remote area. Little money is spared, therefore, for locals to purchase and maintain an expensive four-wheel drive vehicle. A lack of requisite skills is another consideration: many locals do not hold valid driving licences and so risk legal repercussions in driving to Purnululu.

Respondents indicated that transport difficulties resulted in the isolation of indigenous people from Purnululu and Park tourism. This isolation fosters perceptions of separation and views of Purnululu as an enclave or playground for rich tourists rather than as a place for locals. Interestingly, the requirement for a four-wheel drive vehicle also contributes to tourist perceptions of exclusion, leading some to characterise Purnululu as “only for the rich” (Lane & Waitt, 2007, p. 113). Yet for many tourists, the difficulty of gaining entry to Purnululu is a great part of the Park's appeal (DEC, 2009; Pinkus, 2010). The issue of Park visitation is a clear example of tension within the Purnululu case study. Park managers face competing demands to ensure access for local indigenous people while retaining the “wilderness” experience for tourists and for which the Park is renowned.

Employment in Park tourism

Employment offers a clear means of indigenous involvement and benefit from Park tourism. At the time of research, Park employment was limited to only two assistant rangers, one Kija man from the Warmun area and the other a Djaru man from Halls Creek. Despite this limited employment, respondents clearly recognised the potential benefits of jobs for indigenous people. Previous opportunities for involvement in Park maintenance may have contributed to this. In contrast with the majority of park and tourism impact research, this appreciation of job opportunities was not primarily conflated with financial gain. Cultural obligations to look after country instead appeared more prevalent. For instance, employment was discussed as opportunities to work as a ranger in Purnululu, assisting with management actions including infrastructure maintenance, re-vegetation and weed/animal control. Maintaining culturally significant sites was also important.

These findings reinforce the centrality of country and of caring for it to indigenous life (Pursche, 2004). The emphasis placed on non-pecuniary benefits of employment highlights the influence of cultural norms and beliefs on perceptions of benefits (Scambary, 2009). Community members may thus afford a higher priority to sociocultural and spiritual aspects of being on country than possible financial gains from involvement in tourism, a perspective that may alienate or remove indigenous people from Park tourism as a potential financial resource.

This finding also highlights the “hybrid” nature of many indigenous economies. Also called traditional, non-market or informal, the hybrid economy recognises the limited relevance of Australia's mainstream market economy for many remote indigenous communities. Instead, state (e.g. welfare) and customary activities associated with country such as fishing,

hunting/gathering and land management form central contexts (Altman, Buchanan, & Biddle, 2006).

Some elements of the hybrid economy, for instance, the production and sale of indigenous art, provide both intrinsic and financial benefits. For indigenous people, art is a way of talking about and mapping “country” (Pursche, 2004), helping to maintain and reinforce existing cultural connections. In Australia, the indigenous art industry continues to grow and achieve international recognition (Altman, 2004), offering those involved the potential to make significant economic gains (Mercer, 2005). Warmun is home to a major art movement and several internationally renowned artists (McCulloch, 2008) whose profile helps to generate publicity for Purnululu and the wider region. Although sporadic, art sales from Warmun provide a substantial income to artists, often well into the tens of thousands, with the majority of sales to galleries overseas and buyers elsewhere, not passing tourists.

Although the income is retained by the Gallery and artist and not distributed among the wider community, this industry does bring a significant amount of money into the community.

Further, familial obligations to share resources mean that often this income is widely distributed and shared among members of extended families.

Interestingly, lack of motivation to engage in tourism was expressed as more of a concern by indigenous relative to non-indigenous respondents. Motivation is critical if indigenous people are to utilise opportunities presented by protected areas to care for country, reinforce its cultural and natural values, and to further community and individual development (Bauman & Smyth, 2007). Lack of motivation may partly explain the poor uptake of tourism training opportunities available to local indigenous people at Purnululu's private safari camps. Camp operators reported difficulties in achieving consistency of indigenous employment, with trainees typically lasting only one season before departing camp employment.

One potential explanation for the apparent lack of motivation to become involved in Park tourism is that this apparent disinterest represents an explicit cultural choice. This explanation challenges the implicit power balance that often characterises indigenous people as “powerless” as a result of past and continuing disadvantage. Disadvantage undoubtedly plays a substantial role in limiting indigenous ability to benefit from Park tourism, as illustrated by a lack of requisite skills or financial resources to become involved. However, it is not the entire answer.

Indigenous people can, and do, make explicit culturally based choices about how they engage with the mainstream monetary economy. Scambary (2009), in research regarding the Australian mining industry, found that indigenous people exercise judgements regarding the desirability and suitability of available opportunities. Individuals may choose not to be involved in economic opportunities available from Park tourism, preferring instead to prioritise non-financial, intrinsic benefits such as the maintenance of traditional practices. This potential influence of indigenous culture on engagement with Park tourism opportunities conflicts with dominant western ideologies, which often cast those not interested in working in Park tourism as “lazy”.

Respondents, as well as the literature, highlighted other cultural factors potentially contributing to the seeming lack of motivation among indigenous people to become involved in Park tourism. These include indigenous concepts of time and preferences for interpersonal contact (Dyer et al., 2003) and “shame” associated with lack of language skills (Trau & Bushell, 2008). Shyness, confidence, reliability and lack of experience in interacting with white people (Nielson, Buultjens, & Gale, 2008) are other potential complications.

Involvement in joint management

Joint management and especially involvement in the Park Council were clearly a concern to the respondents. They highlighted a range of positive achievements and relationships developed between DEC and indigenous people through the joint management approach. However, concerns about joint management and the Park Council were more prevalent. Specific tensions arose from unresolved traditional ownership and difficulties associated with cross-cultural communication. As this study neared completion in 2010, the Park Council was disbanded, with a new decision-making body proposed in its place.

Respondents cited contestations over traditional ownership as negatively influencing the ability of indigenous people to become involved and benefit from the Park and tourism. Other research highlights a coherent, effective and representative indigenous group as central to successful joint management (Bauman & Smyth, 2007). Purnululu is not alone in experiencing difficulties with joint management. Even in Australia's much-vaunted Kakadu National Park, joint management is “defined by contradiction” and rarely delivers mutual satisfaction to either indigenous or non-indigenous parties (Haynes, 2010, p. 23).

Determining traditional ownership is highly complex and lies largely outside of the jurisdiction of Park staff, in the realm of national native title processes. Park managers therefore have limited ability to resolve the conflict.

Cross-cultural communication was a particular issue for joint management. Indigenous respondents expressed irritation that they felt themselves to be making cultural accommodations, whereas Park staff did not return the courtesy. Some felt that joint management was being used to teach indigenous people to be “whitefella” park managers (Adams, 2008). Park staff expressed frustration with the slow progress of joint management and less structured indigenous methods of decision-making. The often gender-segregated or

restricted availability of indigenous systems of knowledge adds complexity (Adams,2008). For example, indigenous members may have been unwilling to share cultural information regarding law, or particular men or women's business, in the presence of non-indigenous people or those of the opposite sex.

Perceived separation

Collectively, the results strongly suggest a perceived separation of indigenous respondents from the Park and tourism. This separation exists concurrently with strong cultural links to the area, considerable financial benefits for some community members and the presence of dedicated indigenous living leases within the Park. Respondents linked this perceived separation with difficulties in accessing the Park as well as dissatisfaction with employment opportunities and involvement in joint management. Difficulties associated with living lease occupancy are also relevant. Unmet community expectations, built through an approach to Park management that emphasises indigenous involvement and benefit, have contributed to this perceived separation. Community members may be unaware or unwilling to recognise that such benefits take time to accrue and may require significant effort to achieve.

The existence of perceived separation from Purnululu and its potential tourism benefits by indigenous community members is an example of a local-scale phenomenon driven by influences arising across multiple social, cultural, political and economic scales. This study identified a number of factors at the community–park–tourism interface contributing to perceived separation, including difficulties accessing the Park, complications with joint management, ongoing legacies of indigenous disadvantage, cultural priorities and the presence of welfare subsidies. The multi-scalar origins of many of these factors preclude a local response. However, there are areas in which Park managers, tour operators and the

community can work together to achieve beneficial outcomes, including fostering indigenous access to the Park to undertake cultural rites and traditions.

Conclusion

This study provides further support to the body of international literature highlighting the ability of tourism to offer local communities tangible economic benefits and employment opportunities (Mill & Morrison, 2006), as well as claims that these opportunities typically accrue to a smaller subsection of the community with the requisite skills and financial resources (Tosun, 2000). The wider park literature, however, often overlooks the significance of culturally inscribed non-pecuniary benefits and motivations (e.g. Coad, Campbell, Miles, & Humphries, 2008; Infield, 2001). By suggesting that economic returns are not the only way in which benefits are perceived, the study highlights the fundamental role played by culture in determining perceptions of benefit among local communities. This finding has implications for Park managers in similar situations around the globe, for whom recognising and valuing these cultural connections offers greater opportunities to meaningfully engage and deliver benefits to local communities.

Despite strong cultural connections to the area, indigenous people felt separated from the Park and tourism. Several interwoven factors contributed to this perceived separation, including difficulties accessing the Park, dissatisfaction with employment opportunities and constraints to gaining employment. Tensions regarding joint management and particularly the Park Council also contributed. Perceived separation, reinforced by views of the Park as a place for rich tourists, is an important area for management attention if indigenous involvement and benefits are to be enhanced.

Perceived separation is not a common theme in the wider park tourism literature, although studies often independently discuss the contributing factors highlighted in this study (Kepe, 2009; Simpson, 2009). The detailing of perceived separation in this study emphasises the need for park managers to implement strategies seeking to physically and spiritually reconnect local communities with their park environments. This is particularly important in the global context of promoting “benefits beyond boundaries” (Bushell & McCool, 2007). Such strategies again present opportunities for park tourism to offer greater and more meaningful benefits to local communities, and, as suggested by this study, may be particularly significant for parks with indigenous communities located within or nearby.

A final proviso: these results show that some indigenous people may not wish to engage in tourism. If social sustainability, including meeting the needs of *all* community members, is the ultimate goal, then such underengagement is also part of the achievement of sustainable tourism. So, although it is essential to improve the opportunities for indigenous engagement in park tourism through addressing systemic issues such as poverty, unemployment, lack of skills and poor access to goods and services, sustainable tourism in the broadest sense may best be achieved through partial rather than complete engagement by indigenous people. The question still then remains in many parts of the world – what other economic opportunities can be developed with indigenous people in remote locations where park tourism does not match their social and/or cultural aspirations (or undermotivation means that such aspirations are lacking)?

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Notes

1. This registered claim affords legal rights to negotiate regarding the claim area and signifies that Kija claimants have successfully established the ongoing existence of traditional laws and customs relating to the Purnululu area (National Native Title Tribunal, n.d.).

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Figure 1. Location of Purnululu National Park in relation to the Australian continent and East Kimberley region. Source: DEC.

