

Cultural Resilience and the Tourist Economy

Cultural Program in Rae Edzo

Report by: Martha Dowsley and Violaine Lafortune

Plenary 3 on Cultural Resilience and the Tourist Economy was held at the Chief Jimmy Bruneau School of Edzo where we were enthusiastically welcomed by Chiefs of the Dogrib First Nation and the school principal Rita Muller.

The panelists delivered thought-provoking addresses. Larissa Abrutina discussed the challenges of the transformation of the economy in eastern Russia for indigenous peoples. Tourism is one new industry that is being developed, but a deficiency in state policy in regard with aboriginal people and ethnocultural factors such as weak collaboration between communities and a lack of entrepreneurship are barriers to the development of tourism as an economic branch. Noel Broadbent showed how poor archeological science can promote stereotypes, as happened to the Saami in coastal Sweden. As the only indigenous group defined by their occupation of reindeer herding, the coastal, seal-hunting Saami archaeological sites have been ignored and their traditional land-use rights revoked through a court case which examined conflicting archaeological evidence as to the history of the Saami in the area. Archaeology is a doorway to validate history, but it is not the only tool.

Such archeological information, when accurate, can also be used as a tool to foster cultural identity in local museums, as long as control is taken by First Nations. Tarmo Jomppanen indeed

discussed how the Siida Saami Museum of Finland faces challenges to ensure valid cultural representation with displays that meet the expectations of the local people, rather than being created for tourists. In this way the authenticity of the cultural display will be assured and will present a more accurate view to the tourists.

Colleen Davison discussed the challenges of aboriginal education by focusing on the perceived value of education to the students of the Chief Jimmy Bruneau school employment and health and how each influences the others. Veli-Pekka Tynkkynen explained that ecotourism and socially sound sustainable ecological development could be a window of opportunity for marginalized communities around old growth forests in Komi, Russia, thereby escape the "resource curse". Finally, Amy Wiita discussed her research proposal on the relationship between environmental perceptions and art by tourists and Native artists in Alaska.

These presentations sparked a discussion on cultural resilience and the benefits and pitfalls of tourism. Mass tourism was perceived by some participants as a threat to cultural identity and authenticity. Cultural tourism could actually kill cultural tourism by focusing on tourists' perceptions of aboriginal cultures. There are alternatives. Mass tourism is not the only

solution. Small-scale cultural tourism, sport hunting, and certification of cultural products were all put forward as solutions by conference participants. However, some participants stressed that tourism can't be stopped, it is a natural part of a democratic society, and it will increase in coming years particularly with the growth of the Chinese economy.

The discussion also touched on different types of tourism, differences between circumpolar communities in socio, political and economic development, ways in which communities can direct tourists, and the importance of linking local and state tourism policy. The new National Museum of the American Indian in Washington was perceived as an important step in that direction since it highlights the recognition by the United States of the ways of the First

Nations. There was also the idea to revive Native research and networking between communities through exchange programs. The square hour closed with a powerful speech by Randal Pokiak of Tuktoyaktuk stressing the important role played by people with traditional skills, such as how to survive on the land. These skills cannot be something to read in a book, they need to be practiced. Cultural resilience resides in the daily life of the communities.

This session theme was most favorably complemented by the outstanding lunch given by The Chief Jimmy Bruneau school, a school where culture plays a large role in the curriculum, and by a fantastic feast and celebration in Rae to close the day. The evening ended with a beautiful display of the northern lights on the ride back to Yellowknife.