Innovative Leisure Practices

CASES AS CONDUITS BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE
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Chapter 1
Ecotourism, conservation, and sustainability: A case study of the Camrose Purple Martin Festival

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Chapter Summary

The Purple Martin Festival is an annual, one-day celebration of Purple Martins (a bird species in decline across North America) that takes place annually in Camrose, Alberta, Canada. In 2002, Purple Martins were chosen as a flagship species by a local conservation organization, and have since become the focus of widespread research and conservation efforts, as well as a community-based Martin nest box landlord program. The Purple Martin Festival serves as the culmination of these efforts each year, and brings together a diverse group of stakeholders involved in various aspects of Martin conservation. This paper demonstrates how the festival has key implications for social, economic, and environmental sustainability related to Purple Martins, and reflects the growing body of research indicating the positive impacts that ecotourism, specifically wildlife festivals, can have on a local community. The festival’s connections to sustainability are supported by an annual Martin survey that tracks the status of the local Martin populations over time, and a participant survey that tracks visitor experiences and dynamics at the Purple Martin Festival each year. Key mechanisms for success of the annual festival and its subsequent implications for sustainability and conservation include establishing a notable public profile, engaging in baseline research, and ensuring stakeholder involvement, particularly in the form of citizen science. The Purple Martin Festival is an example of an innovative conduit between theory and practice; the choice of Purple Martins as a flagship species served as the impetus for notable gains made in all areas of sustainability related to Purple Martin conservation, leading to the formation of the Purple Martin Festival, which continues to serve as the backbone of a network of Martin enthusiasts, Camrose-based Martin research, and overall local environmental stewardship, sustainability, and conservation.

Learning Objectives:

At the end of this chapter readers should be able to:
1. To determine the extent to which wildlife festivals exemplify the growing phenomenon of ecotourism;
2. To examine the broad range of positive and negative impacts of wildlife festivals;
3. To explore the key drivers associated with wildlife festivals and community-based wildlife conservation;
4. To identify ways that wildlife festivals positively and negatively impact environmental, social, and economic sustainability.
The Issue, Opportunity or Trend

As a leisure activity, ecotourism has grown significantly in terms of global participation, economic impact, and as a subject of academic study. With increasing environmental awareness worldwide, environmentally-based events and sojourns are more appealing to both tourists and providers of tourism services as they tend to provide similar community and economic incentives to traditional tourism, with the addition of potential conservation benefits for local environments and communities. These conservation benefits may include incentives to establish or manage protected areas, revenue for wildlife and habitat management, economic impact to nearby communities, incentives for local residents to invest in wildlife conservation, alternatives to other uses that cause more environmental damage, and public support developed through environmental education (Hvenegaard, 2011). These environmental benefits complement and enhance the social and economic benefits typically experienced by communities associated with tourism activities (Weaver, 2001). For this reason, ecotourism is considered to be doubly appealing, both filling demand in the tourism industry and contributing to long-term social, economic, and environmental sustainability.

Many efforts have been made to define ecotourism (Fennell, 2001; Donohoe & Needham, 2006), leading to a diverse, but not agreed upon, set of definitions (Buckley, 2013). However, the discourse surrounding ecotourism has produced recurring themes that can be largely distilled into three main principles: nature-based tourism activities in natural areas, significant environmental education components, and management for sustainability (Blamey, 1997, 2001; Weaver 2001). Accordingly, ecotourism as an industry is largely characterized by the emphasis put on learning about or appreciating nature in a natural environment and integrating practices that benefit and sustain the local economy, culture, and environment in which the ecotourism venture is situated (Ross & Wall, 1999; Weaver & Lawton, 2007). Common ecotourism activities include wildlife viewing, bird watching, whale watching, and plant studies (Hvenegaard & Manaloor, 2007; Weaver, 2001).

As context, there are both positive and negative trends related to ecotourism experiences (Weaver, 2001). For many communities, opportunities to access natural areas are declining as land is converted from a natural condition. This problem is exacerbated as people fall further out of contact with nature due to diminished leisure time, competing interests, and fear of the outdoors. Nevertheless, given the focus of ecotourism on natural areas, educational opportunities, and sustainability, there are significant opportunities to promote positive change in this area. Because ecotourism depends on human interactions with the natural environment, parks and protected areas often provide the requisite natural habitat and viewing opportunities for target species. Thus, meeting the demand for ecotourism can protect or enhance habitats for ecotourism experiences. In addition, environmental education can provide meaningful experiences that ecotourists desire with the target species, the natural habitat, and with fellow ecotourists. These ecotourists can range from specialists (who crave specific experiences with, and information about, a target species) to generalists (who want a broad, nature-based experience). Last, ecotourism ideally promotes sustainability of wildlife, local economies, and nearby communities. Knowing that the influx of ecotourists to a community can generate both positive and negative impacts on the environment, economy, and communities, planners and managers can seek to minimize the negative impacts, and optimize the positive impacts. One particular subset of ecotourism, wildlife festivals, has a strong basis in local communities and will be the focus of this case study (Hvenegaard, 2011).

Community festivals are events held primarily for the purpose of public celebration (Getz, 2008). Wildlife festivals are one type of public, community-based festival that has been growing in popularity. These celebrations focus specifically on local
wildlife features or similar natural elements and occur over a short period of time, typically 1-4 days (Lawton & Weaver, 2010; Hvenegaard, 2011). They may either feature specific, target species or may be broader, and feature groups of species or nature in general. The focus or scope of a festival is primarily determined by the habitats available by and wildlife present in a specific, natural area (Slotkin, 2005). These festivals tend to attract mostly local and regional visitors, and are host to a diverse range of opportunities for education, recreation, and socialization related to wildlife and the local environment. As they are a subset of ecotourism, wildlife festivals should promote the goals of ecotourism, with most festivals being inherently nature-based, putting a large emphasis on education, and often managing and using sustainable practices to host their event (Lawton, 2008). The goal of this case study is to examine the growth and trends of the annual Purple Martin Festival, a wildlife festival held in Camrose, Alberta, and the festival’s connections to local social, economic, and environmental sustainability related to Purple Martin conservation.

The Innovation

Case Context

The Purple Martin Festival takes place in Camrose, Alberta, Canada, a regional hub for industry, education, arts, and finance. The city is situated in the aspen parkland natural region of east central Alberta, about 100 km southeast of Edmonton, on the northern edge of the Great Plains. The geography of the region promotes industrial agriculture as the main economic driver. Over the past decade, the city of Camrose has experienced rapid growth. The population has risen from 15,630 in 2006 to 18,069 in 2014, a 15.6% increase over 8 years (Statistics Canada, 2012; City of Camrose, 2014). This growth has inevitably lead to the continued development and expansion of the city, posing a potential threat to the green spaces, natural features, and wildlife populations of the area (Hvenegaard & Barr, 2015). Fortunately, Camrose is home to an extensive green space and trails network, featuring over 1,750 ha of park and open greenspaces, 21 km of paved trails, and 15 km of nature trails (City of Camrose, 2010). Community organizations make a conscious effort to promote and preserve this green space by actively engaging the public in wildlife and greenspace management through community-based stewardship, education programs, enhancement projects, research, and policy development (Hvenegaard & Barr, 2015).

The Camrose community has a long history of involvement with Purple Martins, North America’s largest swallow. Purple Martins generally live in colonies and are highly social in their nesting, roosting, and migration. From a northern hemisphere perspective, Purple Martins migrate north in the spring to nest in Canada, USA, and Mexico, and migrate south in the fall to wintering grounds in South America. Although the species has historically nested in natural cavities (primarily abandoned woodpecker holes) in Alberta, Purple Martins nesting east of the Rocky Mountains are almost entirely dependent on the human-made nest structures.

Birds made use of human-built nest boxes in Camrose as early as 1918 (Finlay, 1975), and there is an active Martin landlord program today. Although Purple Martins are considered ‘least concern’ by the IUCN, over the past few decades, Purple Martins and other aerial insectivore species have suffered steep declines in population (more than any other group of birds) due to a variety of factors including reduced insect numbers, habitat loss, pesticide use, and climate change affecting their wintering areas, breeding grounds, or areas along migration routes (Fraser et al., 2012). According to the breeding bird survey for the Prairie Pothole region, Purple Martin populations have dropped 5.4% annually between 1999 and 2009. In 2002, a Camrose wildlife conservation group (now called the Camrose Wildlife and Stewardship Society - CWSS) was created, and
chose to use Purple Martins as its flagship species, a “species that promote[s] conservation awareness and stewardship efforts of people” (Rempel & Hvenegaard, 2013, p. 18). Since then, the CWSS has held community events and programs, including the annual Purple Martin Festival (first held in 2010), to encourage public awareness and preservation of Purple Martins and to build a network of Purple Martin lovers.

The purpose of the Purple Martin festival is to “provide a high profile, community-based nature tourism event to showcase the vision and work of the Camrose Wildlife and Stewardship Society” (Hvenegaard & Barr, in press). Thus, festival organizers and the CWSS strive to raise awareness about the role of Purple Martins and other wildlife, offer opportunities for networking among Purple Martin and nature enthusiasts, and promote a nest box program for Martins. Each year in late June, about 80-130 Martin enthusiasts attend the one-day Purple Martin festival to hear from keynote speakers, contribute to workshop discussions, join field trips, and learn from fellow participants.

**Stakeholders Involved**

While the CWSS plans and delivers the festival, a variety of stakeholders are involved in its planning and execution. The CWSS board has been comprised of representatives from the City of Camrose, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Alberta Fish and Wildlife, Camrose and District Fish and Game Association, the University of Alberta - Augustana Campus, Wildrose Outdoor Club, Camrose Ski Club, Tourism Camrose, Camrose Rotary Club, and other organizations in the local community. The goal of the CWSS is to promote a wildlife and greenspace network that enhances community values and quality of life for City of Camrose and area residents (Hvenegaard & Barr, in press). To accomplish this goal, the CWSS hosts a multitude of community-based stewardship activities and programs connected with the local environment and greenspace network. Each summer, this group organizes weekly environmental education events, conducts research on wildlife and habitat conservation, provides advice on local urban planning and management, and develops wildlife and greenspace policy.

The Camrose community is also deeply invested in the Purple Martin Festival and Purple Martin conservation. Individual community members are engaged as volunteer Martin landlords, responsible for maintaining nest boxes, monitoring Martin activity, and collecting standardized data to contribute to Martin research projects (Tremblay & Hvenegaard, 2008). These landlords are on the front lines of Martin care and conservation, and thus have a large stake in the festival, often making up a significant portion of festival attendees.

The Purple Martin Festival’s network of stakeholders also includes individuals, businesses, and conservation organizations, which provide financial or in-kind support. Because wildlife festivals can have notable, positive economic and social impacts on the local host community (Hvenegaard, 2011), the City of Camrose and Tourism Camrose have much to gain from the festival and the number of people it attracts.

**Approach Used and the Impact**

The key innovation is the development and offering of the annual Purple Martin Festival as it contributes to local sustainability in Camrose. This sustainability encompasses economic, social, and environmental dimensions related to the conservation of Purple Martins. An annual participant survey distributed to festival attendees tracks changes in visitor characteristics, experiences, and preferences, allowing planners to evaluate the festival’s success in promoting key ecotourism and
sustainability objectives, and enabling festival organizers to better facilitate these aims. In addition, an annual Martin census provides information about nesting trends.

Since 2010, the festival has attracted a variety of individuals and families from around Alberta and neighboring provinces. Of the participants surveyed between 2010 and 2015 (Table 1), there was a fairly even gender split, with an average age of about 60 years. Most external visitors (95.6%) reported that they chose to visit Camrose specifically for the festival. Overall, 52.4% came from outside of Camrose. These people came from locations as close as Ohaton, a mere 13 km away, or as far as Lloydminster, SK up to 226 km away or Vancouver, BC, (1,250 km away; although this person did not come to Camrose specifically for the festival). The vast majority (93.2%) of participants would definitely or probably attend the festival again. These tourists are the main drivers of the overall positive, yet modest, economic impact in Camrose. In recent surveys, festival attendees reported spending between $10 and $150 (CAD) as a result of the festival, with an average of $79.67 per person. Most of this money is spent in or around the Camrose area, contributing to the local economy and bolstering the positive reputation of the festival in the local community. Registration fees and opportunities to purchase Purple Martin Festival souvenirs ensure that a portion of this money is spent directly at the festival, which contributes to the CWSS fund, future Purple Martin Festivals, and further Martin conservation efforts.

The Purple Martin Festival has also contributed to developing social capital in Camrose. Specifically, the festival is central to fostering a meaningful and interactive network of active Purple Martin landlords. Currently, landlords are responsible for managing approximately 130-140 nest boxes in Camrose. Many of the festival’s activities operate with the intention of nurturing these existing landlords, attracting new landlords, improving effective colony management, and sharing valuable information amongst Purple Martin lovers. In managing these landlords, the festival capitalizes on two schools of thought that may motivate citizens to become and continue being a Purple Martin landlord, those being egoistic and altruistic reasons (Pelletier et. al., 1998). Research has shown that egoistic reasons influencing Purple Martin landlords include the connection that landlords develop with the birds, a sense of achievement or pride, social interaction with other Martin enthusiasts, stimulation of learning, or pure enjoyment (Tremblay & Hvenegaard, 2008). Altruistic motivations specific to the Purple Martin landlords include recognition of the intrinsic value of nature and merits of conservation, a desire to help Martins in particular, or a motivation to serve others and their community (Tremblay & Hvenegaard, 2008). Knowing these possible motivations can help develop strategic approaches for attracting, networking, and supporting landlords.

In any case, the festival serves as a venue that provides a focused atmosphere in which Martin enthusiasts can meet one another and share valuable information. In particular, activities like the beginner and advanced landlord discussions, lectures by notable wildlife enthusiasts and ornithologists, and tours to Purple Martin houses around Camrose allow for productive contact among Martin enthusiasts on the day of the festival.

When attendees were asked about what they “liked most” and their “main reason for attending” the festival, these networks of like-minded people were cited as a main attraction. Overall, the most favorable thing about the festival reported by survey respondents was the information given and learned throughout the day, followed by the speakers and presentations, interaction with the network of Martin lovers, and tours. Respondents’ main reasons for attending the festival were most commonly related to a general interest in birds, wildlife, and/or nature. Many of the respondents also cited an interest in Purple Martins specifically, Martin management, or the landlord program as their primary motivation for attending. By determining these motivations and attractions, organizers are able to continue developing the festival and spreading the word.
about the Purple Martin landlord program. As Purple Martins in the region are dependent on human-provided nest boxes, and evidence suggests that a well-maintained nest box will produce twice as many Martins as an unmaintained one (Hill, 1997), further development of this program and awareness of Purple Martins is key to maximizing Martin conservation practices in Alberta.

Thus, the festival generates the positive environmental impact of increased Martin productivity and greater number of nesting pairs in several ways. First, by developing a network of landlords and increasing landlord skills, there are more landlords effectively managing Martin nests which increases nest productivity (Hill, 1997). Second, proceeds from each year’s festival are used to purchase 1-2 additional nest box colonies, which are erected within the city. Third, the festival has stimulated a new research program that seeks to explore the nesting and migration dynamics of Purple Martins (Hvenegaard, 2014). Ideally, the research project will provide valuable information that positively impacts conservation initiatives in Canada (the breeding territory), throughout Brazil (the wintering territory), and migratory routes and stopover points in between. The project involves attaching geolocators to Camrose-based Purple Martins in an effort to track their migratory flight patterns. The project began in 2012 with the distribution of 29 geolocators, and has continued with 37 geos in 2013, 20 in 2014 and 15 (plus 5 GPS units for more accurate locations) in 2015. To date, 8 geolocators have been retrieved and processed, providing valuable insight into the migration routes of the Purple Martins, which can assist continental conservation programs. Last, this research project has also increased collaboration amongst Purple Martin enthusiasts and researchers (i.e., citizen science; Hvenegaard & Fraser, 2014), generation of interest in Purple Martins, and the development of strong ties between the CWSS and other Alberta-based environmental partners, all of which combine to influence further Martin conservation and allow Camrose to evaluate local Martin populations in comparison to regional or national trends.

Table 1- Purple Martin Festival Participant Survey Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>Average</th>
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<td>Attendance</td>
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<td>100</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
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<td># Respondents</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Female</td>
<td>53%</td>
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<td>46%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average age (years)</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>56.0</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Group Size (# of people)</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average money spent per person (CAD; not adjusted for inflation)</td>
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<td>$55.10</td>
<td>$63.03</td>
<td>$177.39</td>
<td>$57.21</td>
<td>$53.86</td>
<td>$79.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Definitely or probably attend again</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>93.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Implications and Lessons learned

The primary impact of the Camrose Purple Martin Festival is the encouragement of the Purple Martin landlord program and provision of additional nest boxes for Martins, which has led to a notable increase in the local Martin population over time. Since the annual Purple Martin survey began in 2003, the total number of Martin pairs living in Camrose has increased from 8 pairs in 2003 to 86 pairs in 2015 (with a high of 173 pairs in 2009).
The key mechanisms for success related to the Purple Martin Festival are threefold. First, in conjunction with the CWSS, the Purple Martin Festival has established a notable public profile. In 2015, the CWSS won an Alberta Emerald Award, the highest provincial honor rewarding environmental efforts, for the society’s commitment to environmentally conscious initiatives in Camrose, including the Purple Martin Festival. Additionally, the Purple Martin Festival has been featured in several media outlets and the Purple Martin Update Magazine on multiple occasions, exposing Martin lovers all over North America to this Camrose-based initiative. Based on the growing amount of martin-related research, community support, and citizen engagement, the CWSS is exploring new and enhanced projects such as a dedicated nature centre, additional specialized research, and the naming of Camrose as the “Purple Martin Capital of Alberta,” which would continue to build the festival’s public profile.

Second, the success of the Purple Martin Festival has been largely based on the presence of baseline research, on both Martins and human participants. The annual Martin survey allows researchers and festival organizers alike to evaluate the current state of the Martin populations in the area. This, combined with the information gleaned from the annual festival attendee survey allows festival organizers to constantly evaluate the festival’s activities, goals, and direct contributions to Martin conservation.

Finally, the third and largest mechanism for success related to the Purple Martin Festival is the presence of stakeholder involvement. The inclusion of local community members, organizations, and businesses is key to successfully holding the festival each year. In particular, local champions that lead initiatives make the festival possible, and promote Martin conservation throughout the year and beyond the scope of the landlord program. Stakeholder involvement also plays an important, direct role in Martin research in the form of citizen scientists. Citizen science, the practice of involving non-professionals in directed scientific research (Dickinson et al., 2012), is the backbone of the annual Purple Martin survey. Landlords are responsible for keeping track of martin pairs, nests, eggs, and other basic information surrounding their nest boxes, making them key citizen scientists that ensure the sustained success of Martin field research from year to year.

Research regarding citizen science in the Purple Martin project has allowed organizers to respond to motivations and benefits central to participants’ experiences to enhance and expand the program. Specifically, Hvenegaard and Fraser (2014) found that citizen scientists involved with the Purple Martin program have motivations and perceived benefits in alignment; these motivations and benefits include including helping a species in need and learning about Purple Martins. Meeting like-minded people was an unexpected, ancillary benefit also experienced by participants. Involvement with the Martin project has helped to foster greater awareness of environmental issues in the citizen scientists, as well as given them the tools and motivations to become involved with other environmental stewardship projects and practice environmentally-friendly behaviors on a more frequent basis. In short, the Purple Martin citizen science program is mutually beneficial to both the individual participants, as well as to the project in question and the environment at large.

Critical lessons learned by the CWSS over years of organizing and hosting the Purple Martin Festival have included the need for diverse partnerships, the value in educating a broad constituency (not just Purple Martin enthusiasts), the role of high-profile speakers in generating interest, the value of integrating community development with greenspace stewardship, the importance of baseline research, and the need for local champions to lead initiatives. Finally, in the broader context of wildlife and greenspace stewardship, research has shown the valuable role of Purple Martins as a flagship species (Rempel & Hvenegaard, 2013). In the same way that Purple Martins have become established as the flagship for conservation initiatives in Camrose, other notable species may do the same for other locations (Bowen-Jones & Entwistle, 2002; Home et al., 2009;
Smith et al., 2012). By expanding and adapting the idea of a place-specific flagship species as a conduit for conservation initiatives and an annual wildlife festival, other communities and organizations may experience similar benefits to the ones seen in Camrose regarding social, economic, and environmental sustainability related to Purple Martins.

Discussion Questions

1. Select a local community with significant natural attractions. What are some potential flagship species that could be profiled in a nature or wildlife festival? Select one species and explain why it would work best.
2. What are some potential negative impacts of a popular and growing wildlife festival? How can these impacts be minimized or mitigated?
3. Should all wildlife offer some related viewing experiences for tourists? Why or why not?
4. Can society or wildlife viewing attractions rely on tourism benefits in the long term? What could happen if tourism declines?

References


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Chapter 2

Leisure education, poverty and recreation participation: A case study of a community-based leisure education delivery system

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Chapter Summary

Individuals living in poverty face a number of challenges that interfere with their ability to create or engage in meaningful leisure and recreation experiences. Although limited access to finances is often the most cited constraint to leisure and recreation participation among those living in poverty, there are a wide range of other constraints on participation: limited leisure skills; knowledge and interests; discriminatory policies; feelings of guilt and shame; and, poor physical, social and mental wellbeing. Despite the vast array of policies, subsidized programming and supports that the recreation profession and allied professionals have made available, low-income families continue to struggle to access and create leisure experiences. This case study highlights the innovation of a community-based leisure education delivery system to help low-income families learn about leisure, develop the necessary skills, knowledge, capacities and resources, and gain access to a wide range of leisure and recreation experiences in enhance their leisure repertoire. The success of the agency is embedded in their invested stakeholders, their ability to utilize existing community leisure recreation resources, and their focus on teaching for and through leisure. Because of this agency’s unique approach, the application of leisure education at the community level has positively impacted not only the child, but the family unit and community as well.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of this case study, the reader will be able to:

1. Explore the context of poverty in community recreation practices.
2. Examine the challenges associated with subsidized programming and policies for low-income populations.
3. Assess leisure education in the context of community recreation delivery systems.
4. Identify the ways in which community-based leisure education can positively influence low-income families’ wellbeing and leisure and recreation participation.
The Issue, Opportunity or Trend

Leisure is often promoted as essential to personal and collective wellbeing. While it is known that leisure can enhance quality of life, those living in poverty often have limited leisure experiences. Children living in poverty are less likely to succeed in school, and are at higher risk of health issues, developmental delays, and behavioural disorders (Dominique, 2008). Poverty also makes it more difficult for families to access essential resources needed to support healthy childhood development—including leisure and recreation activities.

Limited recreation participation among low-income populations can be influenced by a number of factors. Grants that once supported and sustained organizations have dwindled, and in some cases, important supports for individuals living in poverty have disappeared (Tirone, 2003). Research has established that leisure and recreation participation is hindered because those living in poverty do not live close to recreation resources and they lack reliable transportation (Scott, 2013). Those living in poverty are less likely to travel, spend money on leisure, participate in the arts and visit museums, participate in outdoor recreation activities, exercise during leisure time, and are less likely to use publicly funded park and recreation resources (Scott, 2013). In addition, Trussell and Mair (2010) found that “many low-income participants feel unwelcome when they enter a community center and experience degrading treatment by some of the staff and other participants” (p. 517). Potential participants face other barriers including limited access to telephone or internet registration systems, cost of transportation, lack of childcare options and fear of going out in unsafe neighbourhoods, and publicly declaring low-income status in order to be eligible for subsidies (Frisby & Hoeber, 2002; Havitz, Samdahl & Morden, 2004; Kholsa, 2008; Reid & Golden, 2005; Tirone 2003).

In turn, the recreation profession has developed a number of programs, policies and procedures to address the constraints on recreation participation among those living in poverty. For example, fee assistance programs were developed to help reduce the financial costs in hopes of encouraging involvement in the recreation programming (Scott & McCarville, 2008). Typically, fee assistance programs either provide a dollar amount with which the clients could purchase program entry or they arrange a discount/price reduction (Scott & McCarville, 2008). While fee assistance programs are intended to ease the financial burden associated with recreation programming, their target population may not be fully utilizing these programs. McCarville (2008) found that potential participants experienced the application process to be onerous and complicated. Another study found that although fee assistance programs aided the cost of the leisure activity, it was difficult for participants to pay additional costs such as those for a babysitter. It was also noted that transportation schedules and costs were an issue (Scott & McCarville, 2008).

While fee assistance programs intend to help those in need, people living in poverty may feel exposed, judged and vulnerable when participating in assistance programs (Trussell & Mair, 2010). Scott & McCarville (2008) found that in order to receive any assistance, the potential participant had to provide “proof” of poverty, which was defined by the organization or higher levels of government. This was done by completing a lengthy application process that was only required of those looking to access the fee assistance program. This process fostered feelings of discrimination and lacked privacy because the participant was forced to disclose her income before any chance of receiving the assistance. Once sufficient need had been established, it was common that the assistance program limited the options available for recreation programming.
In the context of subsidized programming, researchers have argued that in the case of community sport clubs, and focus on middle-class preferences and less on the needs and desires of underprivileged children and youth have contributed to high dropout rates among low-income populations (Edwards, Bocarro, & Kanters, 2011). In addition, the location and distribution of these programs are often out of reach for children and youth living in low-income contexts. Though public and private sector funding has been invested in recreation and sport policy to reduce exclusion, low-income children and youth are less likely to benefit from these sport and recreation programs. Government cutbacks have forced public and non-profit recreation agencies to reduce supports for low-income populations (Tirone, 2003). In addition, a number of corporate grants for recreation participation are specific to sport, which limits funding for other activities that are related to arts, drama, culture and other non-sport activities.

While community recreation services have attempted to alleviate some of the challenges faced by those in poverty, they do not address the needed skills, knowledge and attitudes that also influence participation in leisure activities. This being the case, Recreation Opportunities for Children Inc. Eastman (ROC) has embraced a leisure education service delivery system to facilitate low-income families’ access to leisure and recreation activities. The goal of this case study was to explore the impact of a community-based leisure education program on low-income families’ leisure participation.

The Innovation

Case Context

Canada has one of the highest poverty rates for individuals and families among the wealthy developed nations (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2008). In 2011, between 8.8 and 12.6% of people in Canada were living in poverty (Citizens for Public Justice, 2013). That means that nearly 2.7 million Canadians lack adequate access to basic resources such as food, housing and clothing. Of those living in poverty, there are particularly vulnerable groups such as Aboriginal populations, women, single parents, people of colour, people with disabilities, and recent immigrants to Canada (Raphael, 2011). Although the poverty rate is different in each province of Canada, Manitoba has the highest poverty rates for children and female lone-parent families (Raphael).

To address the issues associated with poverty and recreation, the Government of Manitoba’s Ministry of Children and Youth Opportunity created a pilot project to fund community recreation projects that would work on-one-on with families living in poverty to help them access recreation opportunities. As a result of this pilot funding, (ROC) Eastman was developed as a non-profit organization. The primary goal of the organization is to directly help families living in poverty in the Eastman region of Manitoba, Canada (see image 1) overcome constraints to leisure and recreation opportunities.
Knowing that poverty is complex and creates a number of constraints on accessing recreation beyond just limited finances, ROC worked closely with allied professionals, parents from low-income families, and researchers to create a delivery system to address the following challenges:

1. Financial capacity. It was evident that low-income families have limited financial resources to engage in leisure and recreation experiences (i.e. fees, equipment, supplies, and transportation). However, they also have limited knowledge and awareness of what financial resources are available and the processes involved in attaining funds.

2. Limited parental engagement. Poverty can create a number of hurdles that limit parents’ involvement in their children’s leisure and recreation. It was apparent that some parents had limited time, knowledge, skills, confidence, and motivation to support their child’s recreation and leisure interests.

3. Limited leisure exposure. Poverty can limit participation in leisure in a number of ways and it was evident the children didn’t have a large leisure repertoire, which also meant that children lacked the necessary skills, interests, and attitudes to create meaningful leisure experiences.

4. Limited community engagement. Often an overlooked challenge, community engagement can be problematic for families living in poverty. For example, families can be isolated in pockets of low-income neighbourhoods that isolate them from other parts of the community. Poverty can also create feelings of shame that enhance social isolation. For example, parents and children limit their engagement in public spaces, such as recreation facilities, parks and playgrounds.

5. Geographic isolation. In some cases, families were living in rural and remote communities and regions and were faced with distance and transportation issues. As a result, rural families lacked the resources needed to travel to communities where structured recreation activities took place.

Stakeholders Involved

While ROC is a small organization, there are a many different stakeholders involved in the planning and operation of its services. Structured as a non-profit organization, ROC is governed by a volunteer board of directors. The board members are volunteers with a wide range of knowledge and experience in various fields, such as child welfare, business management, and recreation management. The board guides major decisions in the organization, provides strategic direction and supports fundraising projects. In addition, the Province of Manitoba’s Recreation Services Branch, a department within the Ministry of Child and Youth Opportunities, provides a recreation consultant to sit on the board. To conduct their daily operations, ROC has two staff members, the Executive Director (ED) and the Family Recreation Practitioner (FRP). The ED is responsible for assisting in development and implementation of the referral process for new participants, overseeing research regarding recreation trends, needs, benefits and utilize that information to strategize for long term planning for ROC, and working with the Board to set short, medium and long term organizational goals for ROC. The Family Recreation Practitioner (FRP) is the primary contact between ROC and the families. The FRP makes contact with the families and develops individual participant recreation plans based on the leisure assessment results. He or she also implements the leisure education program with the children and families, coordinates the children’s recreation opportunities and assists the family in implementing the plans as required, such as activity registration.
In addition to the board and staff, referral agencies are a key stakeholder in terms of gaining access to families in need. Locating families in need is a complex process and one that relies on ROC’s relationships with community agencies (referrals), specifically agencies that work closely with families living in poverty. Families in ROC have been referred to the organization through several different sources. These include school resource teachers, immigration coordinators, local employers, employment training service providers, and community members.

Approach Used and the Impact

The innovation of this case study is ROC’s delivery system, an outreach-based approach that utilizes the principles of leisure education to support low-income families’ leisure and recreation participation. Leisure education is a process designed to enhance the leisure experiences of various populations. Most leisure education programs are facilitated by professionals with experience in therapeutic recreation (Trenberth, 2005); however, it has been argued that leisure education needs to be part of community recreation services (Nichols, 1990; Sivan & Ruskin, 2000). There is a recognized need for leisure education services and programs in communities (Son, Shinew & Harvey, 2011). ROC has developed a leisure education delivery system, whereby all services and resources are embedded in the principles of leisure education. Meaning, instead of providing direct programming or funding, ROC has created a series of learning sessions (see topics below) and activity sampling opportunities so that families can learn about leisure, its benefits, the resources available, as well as gain skills and enhance their own self-development. The intention is that through leisure education, families will develop the skills, knowledge and confidence to address their health and wellbeing needs through personally meaningful leisure pursuits.

ROC’s delivery system is founded on the principles of leisure education, specifically nurturing the necessary skills, attitudes and self-awareness needed to create leisure. Working closely with low-income families, ROC’s delivery system focuses on two major components: 1) Activity sampling, and 2) Leisure learning sessions.

Activity sampling provides children with the opportunity to try a wide range of activities. Through activity sampling, children are given the opportunity to go through the decision-making process so that they learn how to access community leisure resources that support their desired leisure experiences. The activity sampling component of the delivery system is not designed to provide the child with a sustained exposure to a specific activity. Rather, the purpose is to provide the opportunity for participants to experience the activity in a positive fashion and to learn about the various avenues through which the basic activity can be pursued. Through activity sampling, children will become more aware of themselves, what leisure experiences have meaning to them, the role of leisure in their quality of life, and gain skills associated with planning and engaging in leisure. ROC utilizes existing community recreation programs, services and resources, rather than providing the programming and experiences themselves.

In conjunction with activity sampling, ROC provides each family eight one-on-one leisure-learning sessions that are led by ROC’s Family Recreation Practitioner. Families living in low-income contexts face a wide number of constraints on recreation participation, so the program has been developed to focus on the needs of each family and family member. Parents are a critical facilitator of their family’s leisure engagement; therefore, it is important that parents and children engage in the program together. Each session of the program is the same for each family, but all activities in each session allow for individual exploration, both in terms of the “self” and of “leisure.” The program is designed so that each session builds off of the last one. The sessions are in a specific order so that the learning outcomes from each session can be applied to the next.
Each session has a topic, goal, specific objectives, leisure education tools and games. To create a fun and interactive learning environment, ROC uses custom-designed leisure education games (board and card games) and activities to achieve the goals and objectives of each session. Each session concludes with a series of debriefing questions discussed with the family unit. Facilitators select which tools and games they feel would be most appropriate to use with each family.

A family may remain involved with ROC for 12 to 18 months as the children participate in several activities of their choice. The eight leisure-learning sessions are completed within the first four to six months of a family’s involvement with the organization. Although the initial recreation activities are financially supported by ROC, the program is designed to help increase parents’ awareness and knowledge of the financial recreation resources available in their own community. In addition, the leisure learning sessions incorporate opportunities to create leisure experiences that are unstructured and that can exist both in the home and in the community. ROC believes in creating sustainable leisure recreation activities, so while the funding (for the activity sampling) may end once a family has completed the program, ROC remains a constant source of support and encouragement. Below is a summary of each learning session.

**Session one: Leisure Assessments.**
This session is completed with the FRP and the family in the home. The FRP completes a Child Pre-Program Leisure Assessment form with each child to determine current leisure preferences, barriers, and preferred leisure places. Each child also completes an Individual Recreation Activity Plan which determines several of his or her preferred recreation activity interests. This is completed with picture cards and provides ideas for activity sampling. The FRP also completes a Parent Pre-Program Leisure Assessment form with the mother. This form determines how the mother perceives her family’s leisure habits, barriers, and current resources. Once the session is complete, the Practitioner arranges the necessary means for the children to participate in the activities of their choice as soon as possible. The goal of this session is to assess participants’ leisure lifestyle by discussing the parent’s role in child’s recreation and leisure activities, assessing the children’s leisure and recreation interests, and identify a plan for the children’s community leisure and recreation activity. This initial session consists of the FRP meeting the family and completing necessary forms for each family member.

**Session two: Leisure awareness.**
In this first learning session, parents and children learn about leisure. This first session helps children and parents identify a variety of contexts, circumstances, environments and activities that promote leisure experiences. The goal of this session is to increase leisure awareness by exploring what leisure is and can be, identifying a wide range of leisure experiences and increasing personal awareness of leisure preferences.

**Session three: Benefits of Leisure.**
This session discusses the various benefits an individual can experience through leisure. The leisure benefits an individual experiences can motivate him or her to continue to participate in the activity. Benefits are experienced individually; therefore, individuals participating in the same activity may experience different benefits. The goal of this session is to gain a deeper understanding of the benefits of leisure and recreation participation by identifying and discussing the different types of benefits that can come from participation.
**Session four: Self-Awareness.**
This session focuses on self-discovery through engaging in activities that bring about a strong level of self-awareness. Self-awareness is a component of leisure education whereby individuals have an opportunity to examine various aspects, such as values, attitudes, and interests specific to the context of leisure. Self-awareness is important for leisure engagement because understanding one’s self is essential to knowing how to choose an activity to participate in and also helps people understand how to meet their leisure needs. The goal for this session is to strengthen the participants’ understanding of “self” in the context of leisure by exploring personal needs and the ways in which the participant seeks to satisfy those needs, exploring personal interests in leisure and recreation and examining the participant’s values and how they affect the leisure choices in their lives.

**Session five: Leisure Skills.**
The core of many leisure education programs is the development of the participants’ ability to choose and successfully engage in leisure activities, which involves a wide range of skills. In this session, we can look at skills in terms of those directly related to the activity (i.e. soccer) and those that expand and enhance our quality of life (life skills). Life skills are referred to as behaviours and actions associated with managing and living a better quality of life. Such skills include social interaction, problem-solving, self-determination, and decision-making. Leisure skills are a component of leisure education that can help individuals choose leisure activities and experiences that they would like to participate in and will assist them in discovering their personal needs, values and interests. The goal of this session is to explore the participants’ current skills and strengths in the context of leisure.

**Session six: Leisure Constraints.**
This session focuses on identifying constraints and brainstorming potential solutions to the families’ most common constraints. This session focuses on self-responsibility, which is the process through which participants acknowledge that they are responsible for their own leisure, and through this program they can acquire the knowledge and skills so that they can be. The goal of this session is to assist participants in identifying personal constraints to leisure and negotiating constraints by examining how internal and external constraints impact leisure choices. Then, participants work on developing strategies to overcome the identified constraints.

**Session seven: Leisure Resources.**
An essential component of this leisure education program is recognizing the resources available. In this session, the FRP creates a learning environment to help the family become aware of the resources that exist in their community, including people, organizations, institutions, environments, commercial enterprises, communication structures, equipment, and materials available for leisure experiences. In addition, there is a conscious effort to identifying leisure resources in the home. The intended outcome for this session is to help participants understand the resources available to support leisure and recreation participation by examining community resources and engaging in activities that enhance knowledge of at-home resources for leisure.

**Session eight: Leisure Planning.**
In this session the participants engage in activities that help them develop a leisure plan related to a specific event, activity or experience. The session focuses on assisting family members to evaluate their ideas, proposed decisions, and negotiate barriers. The goal for this session is to strengthen the participants’ leisure and recreation planning skills by discussing goals,
creating and troubleshooting action plans for leisure, exploring the skills and knowledge relevant to leisure planning and examining how to maintain leisure as a priority once ROC’s involvement is concluded.

Implications and Lessons learned

Since 2013, the leisure education program has impacted 11 parents and 26 children in several different ways. Through interviews with parents and program staff and structured observations we found that the children, parents, family unit, and the surrounding communities were each positively influenced by the leisure education delivery system. First, the children in the program developed a wide range of new skills. The children learned activity skills by participating in activities of their choice. Along with activity skills, the children also developed personal skills such as communication, decision-making, and problem solving. The children were able to make decisions regarding their own leisure activities, such as which activities they would like to try and how will they spend their time at home. They were also able to develop problem-solving skills as solutions to common barriers discussed in interviews conducted with the parents, such as how to balance homework and activities, safe transportation in the winter, and financing registration costs.

The children’s self-esteem and confidence also improved through the learning sessions and activity sampling. Developing new activity and personal skills enhanced the children’s confidence as they discovered activities at which they excel. Second, the parents involved in the program experienced declined levels of stress leading to improved mental health. The parents shared that they have less stress when their children are involved in meaningful activities because they believe the children are learning something useful while they are able to have time to themselves. This personal time allows the parents to pursue leisure activities of their own, such as walking or connecting with friends. Through the program, parents also became more engaged in their children’s activities. Before ROC, there was little engagement in the children’s activities because they often took place at home and required little commitment (i.e watching TV, playing video games). Through ROC, the parents were learning more about their children and have become a source of encouragement and support for the children. The parents were also more engaged in the planning process of their child’s activity. The parent’s enhanced engagement in their child’s life has fostered an environment where the parents can play with and learn about their child through a meaningful leisure experience or a structured recreation activity.

Third, the family unit as a whole was impacted by ROC. Parents shared about new experiences of the family playing and learning together when a child brought home the activity skills he/she has learnt. For example, a family is learning to cook together after a child joined a cooking class and wanted to try the recipes he learnt with his family. Families are learning about each other and other leisure activities as the children continue to develop activity and personal skills at home. The relationships in the family unit are improving because of increased communication and engagement. Parents shared that communication with their children improved because the child’s activities provided a conversation topic, compared to before when home-based activities were more of a distraction than a fulfilling endeavor. Parents were also more engaged in their children’s activities by providing encouragement and support. This created a stronger connection between parent and child. Fourth, the community has started to see the impact of these positive changes within individuals and families. Families are becoming more engaged in their community through recreation activities. Engaging in community can often be challenging for low-income, single parent families because of the negative stigmas they encounter. While various programs attempt inclusivity, rigorous application processes can be discouraging (reference). ROC bridges the gap between these families and the community programs, allowing them to become fully involved. The families involved in ROC give back to the community
by applying the recreation skills they have learned, since individuals or entire families have volunteered for various community events. Children have also shared their recreation skills with their community by knitting baby clothes for those in need and creating encouraging cards with scrapbooking supplies.

Discussion Questions

1. Select a marginalized population in your community and identify some challenges they face in accessing leisure and recreation experiences.
2. Based on the challenges noted above, can you think of different ways leisure education could be applied in the community to help the population create meaningful leisure experiences?
3. In what ways might leisure education be useful for other community recreation challenges?

References


Leisure education, poverty and recreation participation: A case study of community-based leisure education delivery system
Hiebert and Oncescu


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Chapter 3

Experiential and community-engaged learning: Improving the health of Cape Breton Island, one fourth grader at a time

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Chapter Summary

This case study documents experiential learning opportunities for students and faculty from Sport and Human Kinetics (SPHK) courses at Cape Breton University (CBU). We explore ways in which learning opportunities created an impact on student learning and leadership. Students created sessions for a university led, community engagement program called ‘Youth in Motion’ (YiM). The program involves grade four students from every school on Cape Breton Island engaging in a half-day of physical activities. The university students were responsible for conducting thirty-minute sessions with each school group five times over the course of the half-day. First year course programming was more faculty structured, while third year programming was more student directed. Four students from each class, a fourth-year undergraduate teaching assistant, and the two professors involved in YiM were interviewed after the completion of the courses. Interviews were on average 15-30 minutes long and asked a series of questions that delved into the learning experiences of students and faculty involved in this initiative. Students were impacted by their YiM experiences in ways that influenced their understanding and leadership of developing fundamental movement skills and outdoor programming. Further, they learned unexpected lessons about communication, patience, and they noted that learning is fun! The professors noted that they could push the students’ learning further than they would in traditional pedagogies and that it was fun for them to be involved in too. There were also several stakeholder benefits. This case study has value for academic and non-academic audiences. Firstly, it provides examples of ways in which students benefit from community-engaged and experiential learning situations. It provides a model for how these experiences can be jointly organized by university faculty members, community organizations, and the university as a whole. Further, for non-academic audiences interested in healthy leisure opportunities for children, this chapter illustrates how programs organized by trained and educated young adults may promote fun and motivating, physically active, and outdoor-friendly activities.

Learning Objectives

This case study has value for academic and non-academic audiences. For academics:

- It provides examples of ways in which students benefit from community-engaged and experiential learning situations.
- It provides a model for how these experiences can be jointly organized by university faculty members, community organizations, and the university as a whole.

For non-academic audiences:

- It provides an understanding of how opportunities for children, run by trained and educated young adults, may promote fun and motivating, physically active, and outdoor-friendly leisure activities.
The Issue, Opportunity or Trend

The Canadian Sport for Life movement aims to improve the quality of experiences in sport and physical activity for all Canadians (CS4L, 2013). One of its key objectives is to increase physical literacy in youth so that children have the competence and confidence to enjoy participating in various physical activities. Diminishing physical literacy is a problem that is affecting people all over the world. In Canada, rates of obese and overweight children have almost doubled in one generation alone (PHAC, 2012). Total screen time of youth aged 10-16 is close to eight hours per day instead of the recommended 2-hour guideline (Wilson, 2012). Developing children’s physical literacy is an important objective in helping them make healthy leisure time decisions.

As such, the CS4L movement has adopted the Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model that has two main objectives: 1) to enhance competitive performance of top athletes by promoting athletic development throughout childhood and adolescence, and 2) to slow the rate of decline in people’s physical activity levels (Ifedi, 2005). For both these objectives, children’s physical development starts in the same way by being active from the outset (0-6 years old), and learning fundamentals of movement thereafter (6-9 years old) (Canadian Sport Centres, 2006). These two stages of development are generic and not sport specific, although the stages of development that ensue have been tailored to various sports based on their needs. The Canadian National Coaching Certification Program provides coaching education workshops, courses, and certification that are designed to give coaches knowledge to follow the LTAD model (Banack, Bloom, & Falcao, 2012). One of these workshops is in helping community leaders learn to teach Fundamental Movement Skills (FMS) to youth in a games-oriented, non-sport specific context (Coaching Association of Canada, 2015). Research has shown that coaches have adopted the LTAD model into their training with varied results. Coaches who emphasized the model was used as a guide (not a strict set of rules) had an easier time understanding how it related to lifelong involvement in sport (Beaudoin, Callary, & Trudeau, 2015). Others found the model incompatible with some rules and norms of their sport, such as swimming’s efforts to specialize at a young age versus the LTAD model’s non sport specific stages lasting until the child is nine years old (Lang & Light, 2010). Little research has been conducted on how the LTAD model is being used by coaches or community leaders who are not in sport specific contexts, such as those individuals teaching children physical literacy and FMS through leisure activities.

The recent Canadian Parks Council (2014) report outlined the dilemma of screen time versus green time (outdoor play), whereby more and more Canadian children do not play outside, they do not walk to school, and they are unaware of the natural history in the area they live; largely because parents and educators are taking it out of their curriculum. Increasingly many youth have health issues related to this (see Participaction, 2015). As such, it is important that we have educated leaders who understand how to develop children’s competence and confidence in physical activity, and also how to motivate children to be active and enjoy the outdoors. Community-engagement and experiential learning are relatively new trends in the pedagogy of higher education, and they are avenues that can be used to help students develop a deeper connection to important societal leisure issues, such as interest and motivation in physical activities, networks with organizations, and the significance of spending time outdoors. It is these methods that we detail further in this case study, and they are critical to the innovation itself.
The Innovation

Case Context

This case study documents a specific experiential learning opportunity for students and faculty from within Sport and Human Kinetics (SPHK) courses at Cape Breton University (CBU) in Nova Scotia, Canada. We explored ways in which a community-engaged experience and associated assignments created an impact on student learning and leadership. Sixty-five students in three courses (one first year course that was repeated in both fall and winter semesters, and one third year course) created sessions for ‘Youth in Motion’ (YiM) focusing on FMS and outdoor adventure programming. YiM is an initiative between CBU, the Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board (CBVRSB), the Cape Breton Health and Recreation Complex (CBHRC), and the Nova Scotia provincial government Department of Health and Wellness. YiM involves roughly 800 grade four students, from every elementary school on Cape Breton Island, engaging in a half-day of physical activities. Every Friday morning from October until March (except holidays and PD days), children from five different schools arrived at the CBHRC ‘Dome’ facility on the CBU campus, and ran through a series of five half-hour physical activity sessions. As part of their SPHK courses, the university students were responsible for conducting thirty-minute sessions with each school group; run five times during a single Friday morning.

In 2014-2015, YiM completed its eighth year of “day camp” style, active healthy living experiences for youth. The program involves traditional sports, often run by the appropriate local club or varsity team at CBU as well as activities that youth may not have the opportunity to be exposed to within their physical education classes offered in schools, such as the FMS and outdoor adventure programming sessions put on by the students in this particular case study.

Stakeholders Involved

Youth in Motion is managed by an individual working in CBU’s Office of the President. This is a priority community initiative for the university as YiM fits with the University’s interests to:
  - Promise and deliver an exceptional educational experience for students. Our faculty, students and graduates are recognized nationally and internationally for innovative accomplishments from academic excellence to athletic prowess. These successes contribute to Cape Breton University’s growing reputation for excellence both in and out of the classroom. (CBU, 2015)

Currently, Shauna Kelly (from the Office of the President) coordinates the stakeholders involved in the delivery of the program, including the sponsors and volunteers. The program relies on volunteers from organizations, such as Lingan Golf and Country Club, Island Martial Arts, Boardmore Theatre, Soccer Cape Breton, and CBU varsity athletics. Further, the program is sponsored in part by the CBVRSB who pays for bussing the children to the Dome. The CBHRC itself provides the Dome facility for the program, CBU provides other on campus space, and the provincial government (Department of Health and Wellness) provided facilitator training in Fundamental Movement Skills. The Community Studies department (which houses SPHK courses at CBU) also funded a fourth year student Teaching Assistant to help coordinate on Friday mornings.

Shauna and the manager of the Dome, Yann Arthur, were instrumental in working together with Bettina and Pat (the professors involved in the courses). In an interview, Bettina said:
  - I was approached by Shauna three years ago because she was lacking volunteers to do some of the activities for YiM. So I thought that maybe this was a neat initiative to have my class involved in. They could be volunteers while completing an assignment. I thought it was a good learning opportunity for them and something that gets them in touch with the community. She liked that idea. I’ve done it for two years now. We had to re-organize a bit - YiM use to be held on a
Thursday, we changed the date to Friday to accommodate the students’ schedules as it was a more flexible day for them. So Shauna checked with the School board and changed the date for Fridays. We also had to check with the Dome because Yann had various different programs on Friday mornings, but he could re-organize that too. It was a bit complicated trying to get that organized to fit with the students’ schedules but it all worked out nicely... In the second year of my involvement one of the sponsors pulled out in the summer because they had not received the feedback they requested the previous year. I am not sure if we carried on without the funding or if, in the end, Shauna provided the feedback, I think that is what happened, and then we were able to get that funding back again. Those are some issues that I didn’t have to deal with directly but it impacted whether or not I was going to have this as an assignment in my course. Then I invited Pat’s class to come on last year to build on the success and have the students provide outdoor activities.

Pat said:
I didn’t know too much about YiM and I was a little bit worried about where it might go at the beginning, but that was remedied pretty quickly. It rolled smoothly. Everything with the Dome and the set up and the kids getting there [by bus through the School Board], all of that was easy. Shauna was great. She came into my class and explained the history of the program. The students really got into it because it was not like any of their other classes; they got to do something that connected them to the community, which was of real value. The students ate it up... Shauna is the gate keeper of YiM at CBU. She figures out the logistical pieces and the budget. She has the contacts and the connections. She did all the scheduling, she deals with the school board. She is critical! Yann was just always there, on every single Friday and he would help with equipment needs. I would have chats with him about how it is going and whether the busses were late, but to be honest once it was running I didn’t have much interaction with the set up of the program. It is all well set up. It was just the nature of my course and the assignment that I had control of. It was running with what the students chose to do.

While Pat found it relatively easy to organize, Bettina noted that there were some challenges in facilitating her course in terms of organizing across student activities, course delivery, and School board cancellations.

The assignment is no doubt a success. However, it really has taken a lot of effort on my part to ensure, from the beginning, that I had properly organized the dates and made sure they fit with my course content delivery. I worried how students would react to being asked to attend the YiM on a Friday, when this is not their normal class time. I had to make sure that we had all the equipment that was needed to ensure students had what they needed for their sessions. I needed to reorganize when classes were cancelled due to bad weather.

Approach Used and the Impact

Students in the first year course, entitled Sport and Physical Activity Practice, were trained in Fundamental Movement Skills (FMS) in a workshop delivered by Bettina, the professor of the course and also a facilitator for the National Coaching Certification Program. Following training, groups of four or five students developed a plan to deliver one YiM session per group, focusing on helping children learn a specific FMS through games. Each group then practiced their session with their peers and debriefed with the class. They then presented their session during a Friday YiM morning a total of five times so that each school group had the chance to participate in their session. Finally, they each submitted an individual reflection based on their plan, peer-practice, YiM date, and class materials.

Students in the third-year course, entitled Adventure Programming, planned for and delivered two separate YiM sessions in which they led students through an outdoor scavenger hunt. Pat, the professor in the third year course, allowed students as a
whole class to design the sessions choosing the activity in a self-directed manner, writing the plan, and organizing contingencies for weather, etc., determining the equipment needs and prizes, and reflecting on the process throughout. They implemented the sessions in smaller groups that changed week-to-week. Student involvement in YIM is a progression. First year programming is more faculty structured with FMS training built in, while third year programming is more student self (group) directed. In the third year course the assumption is that they will, in the future, have taken the first year course along with a suite of second year courses that do not interact with YIM. However, at present this is not always the case. The instructor must gauge the group’s ability and offer expertise in the planning and implementation phases as required.

Four students from each class, a fourth-year undergraduate teaching assistant, as well as the two professors involved in YIM were interviewed after the completion of the courses. A small focus group was also held with other partners as related to the 3rd year class. Interviews were on average 15-30 minutes long and asked a series of questions that delved into the learning experiences of students and faculty involved in this initiative. Pseudonyms have been assigned to all student quotes in this article.

Many students in the first year course, while aware of the growing pandemic of obesity, were unaware of how youth’s understanding of physical literacy could help them develop an interest and confidence in being physically active, thus acting as a preventative measure to obesity. Students were also generally unaware that youth were not necessarily learning fundamental movement skills in physical education classes and that they could make an impact on the grade four youth through their YIM session. Bettina said:

Students are not aware that kids don’t necessarily learn how to properly throw or properly run in gym class. I can tell them that in a classroom situation, but when they are asking the kids to show them how to jump properly and they are seeing for themselves that the kids don’t know how to do it properly, then the students become really aware of what I was saying in the class. For them to be able to learn that through the experience they are having with the kids is so much more impactful and they learn that they can actually make an impact on those kids too and that they can feel confident in what it is they are doing.

One first-year student, Keith, voiced this same issue:

At the end of each session we would ask “do you guys work on this in school?” and they would say, “no, we’ve never heard of this”. So I thought that was really surprising, and I realized that these are important aspects that should touched on in school. I feel like they were kind of missing out. There were kids that were fortunate to be involved in extra-curricular activities that do have a step up but those less fortunate are not getting that. The fundamental movement skills themselves are kind of overlooked and should be properly taught at young age, therefore they are carrying bad habits when they get older.

Another first-year student, Kristine, said:

It was nice to work with the schools because they don’t get a lot of time in class to achieve their objectives so it was nice to give them an opportunity to learn and we were learning as well so it was a good partnership, it was win-win.

Many students also had never had the opportunity to apply directly what they learned as part of a course to a community-engaged initiative. First-year student, Brian, said:
We were able to implement our session. It wasn’t just come up with the session and “yay that’s great”. We had to teach someone to do it. That really helped with learning - being able to follow through with everything. It was not just everything in writing, it was physically happening.

All of the 3rd year students concurred, including Kim, who said:

It was nice to do hands-on stuff, working with people, as opposed to just learning about working with people. A lot of time in courses they teach you all these things but they never really give you the chance to actually try to do something. This was in-depth learning: we had to think about it from our own perspective, decide what it is we were doing, how we were doing it, and who we were doing it with. Kids can be all over the map and I really had to think in the moment about everything that I learned in the classroom. We learned a lot from that. It was probably one of the most fun things I’ve done since I started at CBU.

Students also learned leadership skills that permeate throughout the program structure. Michael said,

We had to work with other students that we did not necessarily know. We had to come together and agree on what we believed would be best for the children to learn. That definitely developed my leadership skills. Then we had to implement the actual session. I really saw my group members come out, direct, and help the children. I didn’t see that before. It was really surprising to see how we came together, stepped forward and made this positive motion and I feel that everyone really developed some sort of leadership quality.

Bettina added:

Once they have the experience, they understand that they can actually take on leadership roles in different ways. So even if they are not the person who is in front of the kids giving instruction, they can still take on leadership roles by helping the autistic child, or being a role model for the kids in the games so that the kids feel more enthusiastic and involved. There are various types of leadership roles. And I think that they see that through this experience and that they come away with a better understanding of who they are as leaders and how they can facilitate groups.

The fourth-year student TA, Jason, noted: “I really enjoyed the fact that there didn’t seem to be one leader within a group. All the students were leaders, they all had something to do, they all worked really well as a group. ”Our approach allowed students in the first year course to be directed in their endeavours, and allowed students in the third year course to be more self-directed based on what they had previously learned in the first year course. First year students, Kristine and Michael explained: “this was really guided. It laid out exactly what we had to do but we still had freedom, it was good.”

The entire course was leading towards this goal of how to apply physical literacy as well as some other concepts to the community, and more specifically, youth. So having the theory behind this and then being able to apply it in an actual situation was very, very, helpful. Third year students spoke of the self-directedness of their assignment, they enjoyed the “free reign” on activity planning, but of course learned what small items would need to be changed in the future.

Implications and Lessons learned

As described in the section above, students learned the leadership of developing fundamental movement skills and outdoor adventure programming. In terms of the stakeholder benefits, the school children learned physical literacy and outdoor skills, while also just enjoying themselves. One student, Keith, mentioned: “You guys are making that connection with the school systems, which is really good. It was really appreciated by the (school board) teachers, we got a lot of positive feedback from them and that was really rewarding.” Further, CBU’s Office of the President had enough volunteers to run the program
because our involvement. Finally, Dean Morley, Community Sport Development Coordinator for the Cape Breton region within the provincial Department of Health and Wellness, identified the assignment as a leading example for provincial universities for training university students in FMS and connecting them with the community and school board. He said “this is without doubt one of the most exciting and excellent initiatives that I’ve seen” (personal communication, 24/07/13).

While the YiM experiences undoubtedly had positive impacts on the students in the courses, the faculty noted that these activities involve much planning and managing of groups, and can be fraught with difficulties in getting everyone on board with the program. From a faculty perspective, we (both professors) started to plan the assignments and courses in conjunction with Shauna during the summer months to provide dates to the school board that aligned with our courses, and then had to re-organize these dates once we found out about planned holidays or teacher professional development dates that conflicted with the dates we had proposed. Bettina had to book space in the dome for training students and collaborate with Yann Arthur, the manager, to bring in equipment and store it in a secure location within the facility. Pat had to check the outdoor space around the dome (including the wilderness trails system behind the dome). Most importantly, Pat needed to make sure that the back up plan created by the students in the event of inclement weather would work within the dome. Finally, the YiM sessions occurred outside of class time and so both professors had to check that their students were indeed attending the YiM sessions and answer student questions before the sessions started. Some of these last issues were resolved by hiring a fourth year student who acted as a Teaching Assistant for both courses.

Despite the difficulties to delivering community-engaged and experiential learning opportunities, we noted lessons that were learned beyond our course objectives; for example, students could apply what was learned to their job aspirations. Kristine said, “I’d like to work in a community center, working with youth and doing programs like employment programs and working in day camps. That’s kind of where I see myself.” Keith noted, “My plans next are to apply to med school. The communication and leadership aspects from this course will help me speak up in med school interviews. And just being part of a team and a group working together with people is a step in the right direction.” Michael also added, “I definitely think that this experience helped me realize that I want to be involved with the community and help out with physical literacy especially with the youth. That is what I am leaning towards doing in the summer.”

Further, beyond the course material, students spoke of learning unexpected lessons. One student said, In our session we had an autistic girl. During introductions she got very scared and left for a few minutes. When she came back, I sat down in front of her and introduced myself... The only examples of autistic children I have seen have been children who are unable to interact fairly normally with others... I learned that there are varying degrees to autism and that you can’t always tell when someone has it.

Another student, Kristine said,

I was kind of scared because I was in a group with all international students. I was finding it really hard to understand one student but throughout working with them I actually got better at it, the language barrier kind of came down because he could show me. It was just easier to communicate because it wasn’t just words, it was movement.

Bettina also noted,

Beyond learning the course content, quite a few of them learned that learning can be really fun at the university level. It does not have to be dry and boring memorization. It can be about experiencing things they never thought they would experience. If I can open up students’ understanding of learning in that way then to me that is really powerful.
Kim, said,
The course showed me that learning can actually be fun and that you can enjoy what it is that you are learning. I had a lot of fun, especially going to the dome, it was really refreshing as opposed to just sitting in a classroom all day.

Pat explained,
It is probably the course I had the most fun with since I joined CBU. These guys were teaching grade fours how to do outdoor stuff and that’s pretty positive. We are watching kids get good self-esteem and enjoy themselves on a Friday morning, getting out of the classroom and going away with smiles. It is just all around a positive community involvement package. So for me it was a really nice, really fun course and student population. And I had a wide variety of different CBU students so for me it is neat to see. Teaching in this manner is valuable because I’m guessing some of these students don’t do well in the traditional academic realm but they are the high functioners in my particular course. So if I had chosen to just lecture info at them and give them a test on adventure programming and outdoor education they would have come out with a 55 and now they come out with a 90. They probably learned more in this type of class than if I had spit information at them.

Both professors also learned lessons through the experience. Bettina said,
I have only been a professor for three years and I have been doing this for two years. So much of it for me has been figuring out that: a) I am not somebody who really likes to lecture; and b) I really do enjoy having students engage with the community and these opportunities for them to learn in experiential ways. The community studies program at CBU was attractive to me because I really loved the idea of experiential and community-engaged learning. I didn’t have a clear understanding of how I could use that pedagogy in the sport and human kinetics courses. I was a student of a large university where it was very much lecture-based, written paper assignments, and multiple choice exams, and so being involved in this endeavour has really allowed me see how I can change that format and make it much more experiential and community based. I am continuing to try to evolve that understanding. This first year course is still quite directed in terms of what I am asking the students to do and how I am walking them through step-by-step what they are doing. Perhaps those students need to have that direction but as they are gaining skills in that area then what can I do? In learning about the delivery of the third year course, the students were self-directed in what they were trying to do within that course. I started to reflect on how else I can open student learning to make it more about them choosing what they are doing, how they are going to learn but still respecting the content and objectives of the course.

Pat said,
Being new at CBU I’m still figuring out how I can push a segment of our students a lot further than they might have been pushed before. Now I feel that I could ask a lot more of them in terms of both the functional logistical stuff, like asking them to possibly facilitate a third week [of programming as the 3rd year course asked each student group to lead two weeks] and asking them to go deeper in some of their reflection... Next year, I will give them the same degree of freedom but based on this year I feel like right up front we want to plan the primary activity plus the snow day activity, plus the rain day activity. So in future years when I ask them for a program plan I’m actually looking for three whole program plans.

In relation to the implications of such assignments, both professors felt that student motivation was high, which made it worthwhile. Bettina noted:
Is it worth it? YES! The students take so much from it! You can see that they are excited to come to class, they listen and actively take part in the classes, they don’t seem to mind at all that I am asking them to do extra work in terms of coming in on a Friday, they are happy and motivated to learn, they ask me additional questions, and who knows, maybe they are inspired to pursue work in this area!

Pat added:
I asked the students to spend an extra three hours on a Friday outside of their class time on a day when most of them don’t even have classes and most of the feedback was “I love this, this is the greatest thing ever. You could have made me run three or four weeks of sessions”. I gave them two weeks per student thinking that was on the high end of things but they said “no way, we loved coming to school to work on this”.

Students in Pat’s class – who were mainly at the end of their university career – mentioned that every course should engage students like this; all CBU classes ought to give back to the community. One student, Michael, noted:
One of the biggest things that universities should try to implement in any program is to have theoretical knowledge of the program as well as applied knowledge. With the YiM, you are physically doing what you have learned. I think that more programs should incorporate something like this. The YiM program is not a controlled environment so you don’t know what to expect. I think having this kind of environment helps with the course because it puts into perspective what the goal is and you learn more from it. And then having a reflective assessment after combines all your knowledge and let’s you reflect on what you have done and then you can say this is what you’ve improved on.

The implications of learning in this way are clear: it is in-depth, fun, motivating, and students learn beyond course content. Faculty can also use this experience to learn and reflect on their practices. Finally, the community can benefit too.

Discussion Questions

1. As a student, how might an experience such as working with Youth In Motion shape your job aspirations? How might a student be able to use the ‘intangible’ learning opportunities in their next job? Think of specific content areas, but also skills such as communication, group work, planning, and reflection.
2. If you were a student working with this program, what issues or challenges might arise that you were not expecting? How might you learn from that?
3. As a student, when you create a program such as this, what is your “Plan B” or C/D/E? For inclement weather, apathetic students, unprepared students, etc. Why is it important to plan these alternative scenarios?
4. As a faculty member, if this type of large-scale, community-engaged project is not within the realm of possibility for your class, what “paired down” ideas might work in your context?
5. For all stakeholders, what is the benefit of these type of large, multi-stakeholder initiatives to placing societal value on leisure?
References


Experiential and community-engaged learning: Improving the health of Cape Breton Island, one fourth grader at a time

Callary and Maher

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Chapter 4

Private land, public interest: Securing private land access to encourage amenity based migration for community development

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Chapter Summary:

In order to support diversified forms of economic and community development, rural communities are increasingly investing in recreational opportunities on neighbouring lands, including agri-tourism and mountain resort development. However, in communities where significant proportions of peripheral land holdings are privately owned, opportunities for recreational land access and development are restricted or threatened. The Village of Cumberland, located on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, is home to a premier network of mountain biking trails developed by local users on a mix of both public recreational and privately owned industrial land. Without the existence of a formalized land use agreement between local public, private and not-for-profit land interests, the value of Cumberland’s mountain biking trail network cannot be wholly realized. This case study details the collaborative land-use management partnership that has been developed in Cumberland in order to support economic and community development through amenity migration and the promotion of recreational mountain biking. Through sharing the costs and benefits of managing private land use, Cumberland’s multi-sector stakeholders have ensured that their individual strengths are utilized and unique interests are addressed.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of this case study, the reader will:

1. Understand recreational land use issues on privately owned land on Vancouver Island, British Columbia;
2. Learn how competing local land-use interests can collaborate to ensure the best use of natural resources;
3. Recognize the contribution of recreation and tourism to rural community development
The Issue, Opportunity or Trend

In Canada, many rural areas, including the mountainous forest communities of British Columbia, once subsided on the strength of local natural resource industries; as natural resource extraction economies have matured and declined, these same communities have struggled to identify and create new strategies for both community and economic development. A common response to this issue has been increased community investment in leisure-based development alternatives, including agri-tourism and major resort development (Nepal and Jamal, 2011; Ooi, Laing, & Mair, 2015). However, not all rural communities benefit from the proximity of suitable agricultural lands, functional mountain landscapes, or even adequate access to suitable recreational spaces. While publically accessible Crown land is prevalent across much of Canada’s rural mainland, on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, private industrial interests own a substantial amount of the land that surrounds communities, diminishing the opportunities for recreational development. The TimberWest Forest Corporation is the largest private landowner on Vancouver Island, holding title to 804,200 acres of forestland (TimberWest, 2010b). Though TimberWest authorizes the limited use of their land for responsible recreational endeavours through an application and permit process, a great deal of access to their private land holdings is restricted in order to protect the interests of public safety, owner liability, wildfire risk reduction, and natural resource protection (TimberWest, 2010a). The scarcity of land for leisure-based development is uniquely challenging for rural communities on Vancouver Island, where further leisure-based development requires integrated multi-sector partnerships to secure access to privately owned land (Benson, 2001). This case study provides a description of the innovative process by which the rural Village of Cumberland, a not-for-profit mountain biking association, and private logging interests have collaborated to create an alternative land use strategy that is strengthening the community and local economy by sharing the abundant surrounding forestland.

Privately owned rural land represents a new frontier to recreational users, providing ideal and unspoiled locations for leisure activity (Benson, 2001). Private land access is an important component of many popular, rurally based leisure activities including hunting, wildlife viewing (Benson, 2001), hiking, camping, motorized vehicle use (Daigle, Utley, Chase, Kuentzel & Brown, 2012), and mountain biking (Mason & Leberman, 2000). The desire of recreational users to access privately owned land is related to the absence of suitable public space; when little appropriate public land is available, users will seek additional spaces to recreate (Daigle et al., 2012). Securing proper access for recreational use on private land is a significant managerial issue that requires innovative and collaborative responses from the different stakeholders involved (Weiss et al., 2007). Extant literature on the public demand for private rural land use highlights three dominant managerial responses: open land access, paid recreational use, and collaborative management. The most liberal managerial view of private land access, open-access, allows entry for all leisure-users, providing they are undertaking non-invasive leisure activities; trusting that users will responsibly use the spaces they visit (Benson, 2001). Open land access to private forestland is commonly practiced in the northeastern and western United States, where low-impact recreational access is a long-accepted regional tradition (Daigle et al., 2012). Open access is also practiced in several Western European countries where open recreational access is a right of citizens (Weiss et al., 2007). In contrast to the progressive approach of open land access, paid access involves landowners levying usage and permit fees for recreational use (Daigle et al., 2012). Paid recreational use often emerges as a managerial response in locations where issues of private property damage, recreational user safety, and land-use conflicts may emerge (Daigle et al., 2012). Between the two polarized responses of open access and paid use, private land access has also been managed through innovative, collaborative partnerships between differing stakeholders and land interests (Benson, 2001; Weiss et al., 2007).
The sustainable use of private land for leisure use requires collaborative partnerships where the interests of public governing bodies, recreational users, and private landowners are all considered (Benson, 2001; Weiss et al. 2007). In a collaborative private land access partnership, the stakeholders involved can ensure their individual concerns are addressed and that their unique strengths can be contributed towards land management (Weiss et al., 2007). The collaborative management of recreation on private land requires meticulous planning between stakeholders and an amalgamation of natural resources including land, trees and trails; social capital including knowledge, strategic planning and trust; as well as financial resources including funding and infrastructure (Mason and Leberman, 2000; Weiss et al., 2007). Collaborative land management also allows for stakeholders to share the costs and benefits of managing recreation on private land communally. While the predominant share of power in this relationship resides with private landowners who ultimately dictate land access and are primarily focused on resource cultivation; each land interest benefits through collective land management; recreational access provides social benefits to users, generates economic impacts for the local economy, and fosters positive public relations for the landowner (Daigle et al., 2012). Collaborative partnerships also help alleviate the cost of mitigating the negative impacts that are associated with private land access, including soil erosion, existing trail widening, vegetation-growth changes, and littering, by dispersing the responsibilities amongst the stakeholders (Goeft & Alder, 2001). The shared burdens and benefits of a collaborative land use partnership make the damage and risks of recreational land use much more tolerable for private landowners (Benson, 2001). Additionally, recreational user-groups possess an extensive knowledge on their leisure activities and it is important that users play a participative role in local leisure planning and land access decision-making (Mason & Leberman, 2000). Collaborative partnerships allow for leisure organizations representing user-groups to act as intermediaries between landowners and users, educating recreational users to ensure the responsible use of natural resources (Daigle et al., 2012). For example, in Wales, UK, a local mountain biking organization contributes to collaborative management by communicating land access issues with the cycling community at large and promoting the local trail system to encourage new visitors (Weiss et al., 2007).

Mountain biking is a leisure activity that is increasingly being promoted as an economic alternative in forested rural communities. Increased access to private lands for recreational use contributes to community and economic development by encouraging active residents, attracting visitors seeking leisure opportunities, and promoting the development of leisure-related shops and ancillary services to compliment recreational opportunities (Weiss et al., 2007). The development of mountain biking trails through a mixture of both public land and private forestland in Wales, UK through an integrated partnership led to an influx of £1 million into the local economy, while attracting major corporate sponsorships to defer the costs associated with trail management, promotion and upkeep (Weiss et al., 2007). In a Canadian context, British Columbia’s Sea to Sky Corridor in the Whistler region generated an estimated $10.3 million in spending from cyclists living outside the area during just 3.5 summer months in 2006 (MBTA, no year).

The Innovation

Case Context

The small community of Cumberland, located in the Comox Valley region of Vancouver Island, British Columbia, is home to a renowned series of mountain biking trails that have branded the Village as a legitimate cycling destination (Mountain Biking BC, 2015). In addition to informal recreational mountain biking, Cumberland’s trails also play host to a series of annual races, group rides and cycle-centric events organized by the United Riders of Cumberland Mountain Bike Club (UROC). The Village of
Cumberland is a community that has long been tied to the natural resources that surround it. Originally founded as a mining community in 1888, the historic Village grew and regressed with the development and eventual decline of the local coal extraction industry (Village of Cumberland, 2015b). The preceding industrial use of the surrounding forestland left a vast footprint of logging trails and access roads surrounding Cumberland, which have been used by local mountain bikers to connect an expansive system of narrow biking trails. The current mountain biking trail system is accessible directly from the Village itself and includes over 70 distinct trails and connectors running through both public and privately owned land (Comox Valley Mountain Biking, 2015). The trails contained within public lands reside within the Cumberland Community Forest and Coal Creek Historic Park. The Cumberland Community Forest is a community owned recreational area comprised of 71 hectares of forestland purchased from timber interests by members of the Cumberland Forest Society in 2005 and donated to the Village (Village of Cumberland, 2015a). The recreational area within the Cumberland Community Forest and the mountain biking trails it contains are protected by a development covenant that permits certain low-impact recreational usage such as cycling on existing trails, while prohibiting invasive developments, such as new recreational trails (Village of Cumberland, 2015a). The Cumberland Community Forest demonstrates one strategy towards local forest conservation. However, timber interests have been found to be more likely to allow public access for active recreational use rather than passive natural conservation (Daigle et al., 2012). By partnering with UROC, the Village of Cumberland can better ensure the conservation of local forest resources through their active use.

However, issues of land ownership and recreational access have complicated the use of Cumberland’s mountain biking trail network. Developed by a committed group of local riders over a decade of work, the Cumberland mountain biking trail system now intersects both public and privately owned land that has been designated for forest preservation and timber cultivation respectively. Recreational trail use in Cumberland is largely informal; the community of cyclists police themselves, knowing their access to private lands is a privilege rather than a right. While the community is home to a premier trail system, without a formalized land access agreement the existing mountain biking trails cannot be completely utilized by recreational riders, or promoted through marketing strategies. Specifically, without a collaborative partnership between stakeholders to define trail-user responsibility, regulate use, and mitigate the legal liability of private landowners in the event of accidents, Cumberland’s trails cannot be promoted and utilized as a tool for community and economic development.

**Stakeholders Involved**

As Cumberland shifted from a community focused on natural resource extraction to one championing outdoor leisure opportunities, it has been important for different stakeholders to work together to ensure a viable future for recreational cycling access for all interests. The three major stakeholders involved in developing a formal trail access agreement in Cumberland are the Village of Cumberland, the United Riders of Cumberland Mountain Bike Club, and private landowners represented by the significant timber holdings of TimberWest Forest Corporation and Hancock Forest Management Incorporated.

The United Riders of Cumberland Mountain Bike Club (UROC) represents the interests of cyclists in securing trail use agreements with the timber companies and the village. UROC formed in 2008 as a registered not-for-profit association that is now comprised of approximately 180 dedicated members (UROC, 2014). UROC represents the greater regional cycling community in securing private land access, advocating for riders, organizing annual races, fundraising events, promoting the Village as a mountain biking destination, promoting active living within the community, and performing necessary trail...
maintenance (UROC, 2015a). UROC is conscious of their environmental dependency on forest resources and the club acknowledges the impact of mountain biking on the surrounding forest and the trail system it contains. The group’s loyal cadre of members volunteer their time to participate in organized trail maintenance days on local trails in order to mitigate erosion and other rider-caused trail impacts, and dismantling illegally constructed trails (UROC, 2015d). UROC also acts as the voice for cyclists in the greater Comox Valley region. The association actively pursues trail access agreements with various private interests, communicates messages from land owners to the cycling public, and hosts community events such as trail use forums in order to better understand the perspectives of different trail users and stakeholders (UROC, 2015c). UROC is an association that strategically aligns itself with similarly focused community organizations such as the Cumberland Community Forest Society, to whom UROC has raised and donated funds in order to further protect the local forest periphery from encroaching logging operations (UROC, 2015b). Without such a visible, unified organization to act on the behalf of cyclists, it would be much more difficult to advance recreational cycling opportunities in Cumberland.

The second major stakeholder involved in securing trail access for recreational cyclists is the Village of Cumberland Council, who represent the interests of local government. Cumberland is a community that is currently branding itself around its abundant outdoor recreational opportunities and amenities, as evidenced by the purchase and donation of the Cumberland Community Forest, as well as reinvestment in community parks, camping, and recreational amenities (Village of Cumberland, 2015b). The Village has also committed to expanding local cycling opportunities including a new bicycle jump park and an informational kiosk to be constructed in 2015 (Village of Cumberland, 2015d). The Village manages and regulates the portion of the mountain biking trail network that is currently contained within the public areas of the 71-hectare Cumberland Community Forest and the 40-hectare Coal Creek Heritage Park, and also assists UROC in the pursuit of formalized land access agreements with private landowners (Village of Cumberland, 2015c). In 2012, Cumberland Council created the position of Parks and Outdoor Recreation Coordinator to ensure the efficient management of local recreational resources and to officially facilitate private land access negotiations that had been initiated by UROC (UROC, 2013a). The working partnership between the Village and UROC represents the type of community level vertical integration that is vital to integrated land use planning (Weiss et al., 2007).

The private forest landowners of the TimberWest Forest Corporation and Hancock Forest Management Incorporated represent two of the most visible and significant private landholdings that are traversed by the Cumberland mountain bike trail network. TimberWest currently owns 804 200 acres of forestland located throughout Vancouver Island (TimberWest, 2010b), while Hancock owns nearly 50 000 additional island acres. TimberWest is self-described as, “a leader in sustainable forest management and is committed to Vancouver Island communities” (TimberWest, 2010). Correspondingly, the major logging firm balances their own economic interests with the social responsibility that is associated with the consideration of recreational interests, including those of the Village of Cumberland and UROC, who are directly impacted by logging operations. Both major timber companies have granted informal trail access to recreational riders and have adjusted active logging operations to better-accommodate riders and mitigate industrial impacts on existing trails (United Riders of Cumberland, 2015e). This demonstrates the willingness that the private landowners have to work with their fellow forest stakeholders on the issue of trail access. Acknowledging and understanding the interests of public governing entities and not-for-profit associations, whose interests may run counter to those of the forest industry, is important to ensure the best use of forest resources on private land. However, the timber companies must also carefully manage how the land they own is accessed and used; unregulated or unpermitted trail access can raise recreational user safety concerns, increase backcountry fire risks, lead to vandalism, and negatively effect forest natural resources (TimberWest, 2010).
Approach Used and the Impact

In order to secure mountain biking trail access for riders beyond the modest public areas managed and protected by the Village of Cumberland, a collaborative partnership between the major stakeholders was required. In April 2013 Cumberland Council unanimously approved a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Village and the United Riders of Cumberland on the issue of securing trail use agreements with private landowners (UROC, 2013a). The MOU, originally a two-year agreement, allowed the United Riders of Cumberland to take the lead in the pursuit of local land access agreements for cyclists with assistance provided directly by Cumberland’s Parks and Outdoor Recreation Coordinator (UROC, 2013a). The Village and UROC each contribute to sustaining the existing trail network; while the Village develops and manages trail use regulations, UROC performs trail maintenance (UROC, 2013a). UROC has also contributed to the conservation of community forest resources by dismantled illegal trails that violate the conservation mandates of the Cumberland Community Forest (UROC, 2013b). UROC also acts as an intermediary between the greater regional mountain biking community and logging interests, UROC continually informs riders of upcoming trail closures and the reasons behind such decisions. The transparency that UROC provides in land use decision-making has fostered a culture of mutual respect between the mountain bikers and the timber company. Since the formalization of this partnership, between the Village and UROC, UROC has actively been working with private landowners to secure formalized trail use agreements. However, while progress has been made no permanent agreement has been concluded between the parties.

Though a final land access agreement has not been finalized between the private landowners, UROC, and the Village, significant progress has been made and a high level of mutual understanding and collaboration persists. This is evidenced by the ongoing recreational use of the mountain biking trails that has been authorized by the timber companies, as well as by the consideration that is given for existing trails during timber harvest planning (UROC, 2015e). Negotiations towards formal land access agreements in Cumberland are ongoing and a resolution is expected, in March 2015 the MOU between UROC and the Village of Cumberland was renewed, paving the way for subsequent land use negotiations (Village of Cumberland, 2015d). Integrated partnerships across different levels of power, influence and understanding can link the resources necessary to ensure the most agreeable use of recreational resources for all stakeholders (Ooi et al., 2015). By continuing to pursue formalized land use and access agreements with major private landowners including TimberWest and Hancock Forestry, UROC can ensure a viable future for mountain biking that is well regulated and beneficial to all of the Cumberland forest stakeholders, promoting and protecting the coveted forest resources.

The innovative partnership at work in Cumberland to improve recreational access has already led to promising evidence of community development. From 2006-2011 the overall population in Cumberland grew 23% with the number of families increasing by 30.4%, far outpacing the national average of 5.5% (Invest Comox, 2011). Additionally, from 2001-2009 assessed local property values in Cumberland tripled (Invest Comox, 2011). Anecdotally, the most significant increase in population has occurred amongst younger professionals who could be categorized as amenity migrants (Moss, 2006), or lifestyle migrants (Benson and O’Reilly, 2009). Amenity migration is characterized by, “individuals drawn to regions with outstanding natural environments, recreational opportunities, and high quality facilities and services” (Ooi et al., 2015, p. 59). While influxes of amenity migrants have been linked to conflicts between stakeholders within a host community over issues such as land use, price inflation, resident displacement, and differing social values (Ooi et al., 2015), The Village of Cumberland has escaped these negative outcomes. Development has been occurring throughout the entire community and has not led to gentrification or economic isolation as found in resort communities (Nepal and Jamal, 2011). Contrary to Moss (2006) and Siemens (2015)
the entrepreneurs in Cumberland are not older, local businesses are generally smaller and locally owned with a greater focus on quality of life than on profits. The community of Cumberland demonstrates tremendous social cohesion with high level of involvement and recreational interest; formalized private land access agreements for recreational mountain biking will only improve Cumberland’s attraction as a site of amenity migration.

Implications and Lessons learned

The development of mountain biking trail access in Cumberland, British Columbia, has been an innovative process of collaborative recreational management (Weiss et al. 2007). Through a unique cross-sector partnership the United Riders of Cumberland, the Village of Cumberland and private forest landowners are able to better utilize forest resources for recreational purposes and create a safe and permissible mountain biking environment that distinguishes the community as a premier outdoor recreation destination, strengthening community and economic development. This demonstrates the power of collaborative relationships where varying natural resource interests are able to consolidate their expertise to an end that allows each party to benefit. Private land ownership is not a barrier to recreational access and multi-interest collaboration can create greater land access opportunities (Weiss et al., 2007). UROC also demonstrates the power that user-driven organizations can harness within a community to help direct the use of local resources; this power is enhanced through UROC’s innovative partnership with the Village of Cumberland. The use and popularity of the mountain biking trail network in Cumberland demonstrates how competing interests – be they for recreation, preservation, or economic gain – may coproduce a situation that ensures a more holistic understanding between stakeholders and ultimately yields the best use of resources for all parties. By working together the Village of Cumberland is able to ensure the conservation of forest resources through their safe, responsible and inclusive use by recreational users in a manner that does not threaten the operations of private forest interests. The collaborative partnership that led to secure access for mountain biking in Cumberland may be utilized in other diverse leisure contexts. Innovations in rural recreational access can occur across different land ownership statuses with varying leisure interests (Weiss et al., 2007).

Discussion Questions

1. What are the potential risks of allowing open access to private land for all recreational users?
2. What kind of partnerships may need to take place in communities with mixed or competing recreational land use?
3. How can natural resources and recreation in your own community contribute to community development?
4. Discuss the costs and benefits associated with private land access that must be shared between landowners, public officials and not-for-profit organizations
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Private land, public interest: Securing private land access to encourage amenity based migration for community development

Wahl and Parker

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Chapter 5

Successful winter tourism destinations: An examination of The Forks National Historic Site, Winnipeg, Manitoba

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Chapter Summary

Climate, whether warm and sunny or cold and snowy, can complement tourism by providing favourable conditions for visitors and their desired activities. As a result, climate is often a main resource upon which tourism destinations depend. Extreme or unpredictable weather may be viewed as unfavourable for attracting visitors. However, even seemingly inclement climate conditions can be used as a resource in tourism. Existing research does not demonstrate how outwardly negative climate conditions might influence destination image, destination selection, and local tourism development. This case study examines how cold climates present both a challenge and an opportunity to developing and promoting an area for tourism. Here we outline how The Forks National Historic Site, located in Winnipeg, Manitoba and a popular summer destination was successfully re-framed as a cold-weather attraction. This case study represents a specific instance of how a tourism destination may highlight a unique feature, such as a frozen river. Readers will understand how harsh weather can become an uncommon resource that facilitates tourism and recreation and enhances overall visitor experience. As such, this case study presents a specific example of how various stakeholders came together to offer a unique experience and transformed an otherwise negative climate condition into a positive and desirable aspect of the destination.

Learning Objectives:

After reading this case study, students should be able to:

1. Demonstrate understanding of the main challenges to promoting a winter tourism destination;
2. Differentiate between challenges and opportunities for creating a winter tourism destination;
3. Demonstrate understanding of the importance of working with flexible stakeholder partners; and
4. List ways a city or community may re-frame itself as a winter destination.
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The Issue, Opportunity or Trend

Climate, whether warm and sunny or cold and snowy, can complement tourism by providing favourable conditions for visitors and their desired activities. As a result, climate is often a main resource upon which tourism destinations depend. Extreme or unpredictable weather may be viewed as unfavourable for attracting visitors. However, even seemingly inclement climate conditions can be used as a resource in tourism. As Martin (2005) noted, undesirable climate, weather, and related parameters have historically been rejected as a tourism resource. However, with the growth of the tourism industry and the appeal of special interest tourism, some formerly unappealing destinations have repositioned themselves as desirable. For example, wind is viewed as a valuable resource for those interested in gliding or wind surfing. “Thus, new types of tourism have emerged, thereby turning previously rejected elements into the main ‘raw material’ (basic tourism resource) of many recreational activities” (Martin, 2005, p. 576). Accordingly, areas, cities, and communities that are subject to what many people believe to be undesirable weather conditions are presented with an opportunity to embrace the local environment to create unique and successful tourist destinations.

Climate plays an important role in tourism from both a demand and a supply perspective. Weather conditions are often considered by tourists before choosing a destination (Scott, Gossling, & de Freitas, 2008). Demand for tourism is influenced by climate and generally people choose tourism destinations and places that are comfortable and enjoyable (Martin, 2005). Sunny, mild destinations, for example, are typically favoured by tourists (Rossello & Santana, 2012). As a result, specific weather conditions and climate, in general, are often featured in destination promotional material because these conditions are known to influence tourists’ decision-making. In addition, destination promotional materials include this information as part of the destination image (Martin, 2005). From a supply perspective, the location of attractions and amenities, type of infrastructure needed, and seasonal opportunities are influenced by climate and weather conditions. Because of the propensity to choose warmer weather conditions over colder conditions, some locations are rejected as viable or potentially successful tourism destinations by developers because of inclement or intemperate weather conditions (Martin, 2005). As a result, to be successful, winter or colder climate destinations are required to provide an extraordinary opportunity for visitors. These opportunities are often found in the form of specific winter activities, such as Alpine or Nordic skiing, or unique experiences, such as viewing Northern Lights.

As weather and climate affect the attractiveness of a destination (Lohmann & Kaim, 1999), destination promoters work to present pleasing images. However, existing research does not adequately demonstrate how outwardly negative climate and weather conditions might influence destination image, destination selection, and local tourism development. In this case study we will examine the reframing of a popular warm-weather visitor site as a cold-weather winter destination. Here we provide a detailed discussion and analysis of the evolution of The Forks National Historic Site (The Forks) as a winter destination. To do so, we examined secondary data and interviewed five individuals from four key stakeholder organizations. This case study examines how cold climates present both a challenge and an opportunity to developing and promoting an area for tourism. In addition, this case study represents a specific instance of how a tourism destination may highlight a unique feature, such as a frozen river. Readers will understand how harsh weather can become an uncommon resource that facilitates tourism and recreation and enhances overall visitor experience. As such, this case study presents a specific example of how various stakeholders came together to offer a unique experience and transformed an otherwise negative climate condition into a positive and desirable aspect of the destination.
The Innovation

Case Context

The Forks National Historic Site is located in Winnipeg, Manitoba and has a long history as a local gathering spot. Located at the confluence of the Assiniboine and Red Rivers, The Forks is a traditional meeting and gathering place for First Nations and Metis people. Given the natural history and local culture associated with the location and its central location in the city, The Forks was developed as an attraction and destination that now serves both local residents and visitors to Winnipeg. Predominantly a recreation area, The Forks has many attractions, such as the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, the Manitoba Theatre for Young People, The Manitoba Children’s Museum, the Forks Market, the Heritage Adventure Playground, the Plaza Skate Park, and the Scotia Bank outdoor stage. Many annual events are held at this historic site including Canada Day celebrations, Winnipeg Jazz Festival, Kids Fest, and Festival of Fools.

Today, The Forks is considered Winnipeg’s primary destination and welcomes over four million visitors a year (see: www.theforks.com). Despite this recognition, only recently has The Forks transitioned into a four season destination. Dubbed “Winterpeg,” as a result of having one of the longest and harshest winters in Canada, Winnipeg battles a reputation of being an unpleasant winter destination (The Huffington Post, 2014). This reputation is perpetuated by locals, Canadians, and the media (Annable, 2014; The Huffington Post, 2014). For example, during the winter in 2014 the Manitoba Museum posted on social media that Winnipeg was colder than Mars on one particularly cold day. This “fact” was quickly circulated by local and national media. Winnipeg, however, is not the only city to hold this title and most Canadian cities are colder than Mars at some point during the year (Kives, 2014). Despite this undesirable status, with the help of The Forks, Winnipeg has recently gained international recognition as an attractive and viable winter destination (Glusac, 2014). During the winter of 2013/2014, with support from local partners, The Forks North Portage Partnership developed the “Red River Mutual Trail” – a 6.1 kilometre multi-purpose ice trail on the frozen Red River. In addition to ice skating (the primary activity), the trail combined art, culture, historic interpretation, cuisine, special events, and active recreation as unique attractions with winter weather and winter culture as the central themes (Fig. 1).

While these activities, events, and attractions were designed to engage the local community, ultimately Winnipeg’s image as a winter destination was enhanced.

![Fig. 1: The Red River Mutual Trail (Ron Cantiveros/Metro News)](image-url)
Stakeholders Involved

The frozen Red River provided a context that allowed multiple partners with diverse interests to work together to create a unique community resource and visitor attraction. Primary stakeholders involved in the creation, maintenance, and promotion of the river trail, itself, as well as the events hosted on the river include The Forks North Portage Partnership, Red River Mutual Insurance, Sputnik Architecture, Raw: Gallery, Festival du Voyageur, Tourism Winnipeg, and Travel Manitoba. Secondary stakeholders who benefitted from the frozen river trail include residents, tourists, and the City of Winnipeg. The Forks North Portage Partnership is a key stakeholder in the development, management, and renewal of The Forks National Historic Site. In their role supporting projects that display the site’s history and culture, The Forks North Portage Partnership had maintained a winter river trail for many years, the addition of the key sponsor, Red River Mutual, a local insurance company, helped to expand the length of the trail and encouraged a diversity of uses and events. The unique partnership between public and industry partners and stakeholders helped promote the Forks, and Winnipeg, as a winter destination. For example, during the winter of 2014/2015, many events were hosted on the Red River Mutual Trail including, an Iron Man Curling Bonspiel, an Ice Bike Race, an Ice Fashion Show, and a hockey game featuring local NHL Franchise, the Winnipeg Jets. Red River Mutual developed a free App for iPhone and Android to allow participants to track their progress on the trail and learn about specific features, such as access points, warming huts and special events. The App was designed to encourage active and regular participation on the trail and weekly prizes were distributed to individuals who tracked their progress and met certain milestones (Fig. 2).

Other stakeholders included Sputnik Architecture, a local firm that sponsored an art and architecture competition and awarded artists and architects from around the world an opportunity to create, construct, and present warming huts along the frozen trail (Fig. 3). Sputnik also worked with a local high school drafting class to design and build a warming hut for display and use on the trail. In addition, a local restaurant worked with Raw: Gallery, an art and design gallery, to host Raw: Almond, an innovative, on-ice dining experience. These events and attractions were supported by other services offered at The Forks including ice skate rentals, free parking, buskers/entertainment, restaurants, shops, and an interpretative centre.

Early on in the creation and expansion of the Red River Mutual Trail, Tourism Winnipeg and Travel Manitoba recognized the importance of the attraction for promoting Winnipeg and Manitoba as a winter destination. These destination marketing organizations are the main providers of visitor information in Winnipeg and Manitoba and promoted the Red River Mutual Trail as a must-see winter attraction for both local residents and visitors. Additionally, Tourism Winnipeg and Travel Manitoba highlighted unique events that occurred in conjunction with the Red River Mutual Trail.
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Approach Used and the Impact

The Forks North Portage Partnership had maintained a frozen river trail at The Forks National Historic Site for many years. In 2008, for example, the trail broke the world record for the longest naturally frozen skating surface (8.54km) (CBC, 2014). However, early on in the development of the river trail, some elements were viewed as roadblocks to the creation of a successful winter destination. For example, although winter can be long and cold in Winnipeg, the speed of the water current on both the Red River and Assiniboine River prevent the water from freezing completely for most of the winter, thus creating a short season for the frozen trail. Indeed, the frozen river trail is only maintained and safely accessed for about 6 weeks each year. Additionally, although The Forks has always been a popular summer destination, attendance numbers remained low through the winter months. Sponsorship, events, and activities were inconsistent during the initial stages of the river trail development. As a result, prior to 2013 the frozen trail did not evolve beyond its utility as a mode of transportation or a place for active recreation. In 2013, however, after a conversation with The Forks North Portage Partnership about possibilities to work together, Red River Mutual became the title sponsor of the frozen trail. This new partnership gave the river trail a fresh start and opened opportunities for subsequent partners and stakeholders to create and offer events on the Red River Mutual Trail and within the vicinity of The Forks National Historic Site.

In the tourism industry, successful partnerships are often challenging to create and foster. While it is difficult to trace the success and story of the Red River Mutual Trail, stakeholder interviews and secondary analysis indicate that the partnership between a diversity of organizations created an opportunity to initiate and build the unique attraction. These partners valued an organic and innovative approach and maintained a commitment to showcasing Winnipeg as a great winter city. The Red River Mutual Trail, therefore, is one example of a successful partnership that occurred as a result of flexibility between diverse partners.

The approach used for the creation of the Red River Mutual Trail was organic and innovative. In other words, a single stakeholder cannot be identified as the catalyst for change or the driver of success. Instead, the success of the Red River Mutual Trail can be attributed to the diverse partners including small, medium and large private enterprise, government and not-for profit organizations. The flexibility between partners and the strength brought by all partners were critical to the successful project as various stakeholders were involved in all aspects of the process. As one stakeholder participant said, “The first year we were very, very heavily involved in the activations. There was a lot of brainstorming sessions. And we always want to be an active partner. We never want to be complacent where we just, you know, write a cheque and walk away. We want to be as involved as we can.” Stakeholders also recognized The Forks North Portage Partnership as the lead partner that facilitated success between partners. As one stakeholder participant acknowledged, “The Forks [North Portage
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Partnership] allowed us to grow. They were instrumental especially the first year in just helping make it happen.” The flexible approach adopted by the partner organizations allowed unique and innovative ideas and events to occur and take hold. This approach required trust between partners and shared ownership of the project. Recent tourism research highlights the important role that small and medium enterprises (SME) play in destination development and confirms the need for facilitators, like The Forks North Portage Partnership, to support entrepreneurial success (Komppula, 2014).

The partners involved in the creation and expansion of the Red River Mutual Trail identified with Winnipeg as a great city. All partners were committed to showcasing and developing activities and events in Winnipeg. For the stakeholder partners, the Red River Mutual Trail embraced and celebrated Winnipeg as a great winter city. The partners, therefore, recognized the importance of developing an image of Winnipeg as a premier winter destination and a great place to live, year round. As one stakeholder participant suggested, “we can’t negate the fact that we have winter for almost eight months of the year... [we thought] “Well, actually, maybe winter is not that bad!” As such, the chance to promote Winnipeg as destination during the harsh winter months was viewed as an opportunity, rather than a challenge.

While many of the activities highlighted on and around the Red River Mutual Trail occurred separately in past years, the partnership between diverse organizations, all with a commitment to highlight Winnipeg as a winter city and destination, has had a positive impact for The Forks, Winnipeg, and Manitoba. As one stakeholder participant acknowledged “we really see it as the core piece of what has become now an opportunity to really promote Winnipeg as a winter city and Manitoba as a winter destination.” As a result of the focus on Winnipeg as a winter destination, the influence on tourism and community has been significant. Estimates suggest 300,000 people used and/or attended events on the Red River Mutual Trail during the 2014/2015 season. In addition, on the February provincial holiday, known as Louis Riel Day, at least 15,000 people used the trail, while many more visited The Forks site. In addition, the trail and particularly the warming huts were featured in a New York Times travel column. The article, entitled “In Winnipeg, a skating rink that doubles as a sculpture park,” cites one local resident who suggested “Manitoba is so cold you have to do something to get people out of their homes...we’re sitting on a chunk of ice in the middle of a river and we’re happy about it” (Glusac, 2014, para. 15).

While the re-framing of The Forks site as a winter destination may be attributed to the flexibility and willingness of the diverse partners to try something new or unique, many important conditions and elements were in already in place. These pre-established conditions allowed for the success of the Red River Mutual Trail partnership. First, The Forks site had an established infrastructure to support the activities on the trail as well as for visitors to the trail. These elements included ample free parking, accessibility by other means of transportation (trails and public transportation), restroom facilities, restaurants, shops and accommodations for visitors. Second, the brand recognition of The Forks as one of Winnipeg’s premiere destinations was important in the development of the Red River Mutual Trail. As one stakeholder participant acknowledged, “Winnipeg is synonymous with The Forks. Most of our tourism is centred around The Forks.” The recognition of The Forks as a main tourist attraction and site, therefore, played an important role in the ability of the partners to work together to further enhance the brand and successfully overcome obstacles to creating a cold-weather destination.
Implications and Lessons learned

The Red River Mutual Trail continues to expand and more attractions and events will be added in upcoming seasons. The implications of this successful partnership for practice include:

1. It is possible to take a negative weather condition and create positive environments that provide a unique visitor experience;
2. It is important to highlight unique characteristics of a destination;
3. Supportive, flexible and creative partners are required for change and growth;
4. Winter tourism is an area that has the potential for growth in many destinations across Canada; and
5. Planning for visitors and destination promotion may also affect local residents’ perceptions of a “negative” climate or condition resulting in an improved image for locals and tourists alike.

Lessons learned include:

1. Shifting destination marketing to focus on off-season opportunities at a time when novel service offerings are emerging can extend the tourism season and result in new tourism products;
2. Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) play a valuable role in developing unique attractions in established tourism zones; and
3. Informal partnerships that involve diverse stakeholders can result in innovative attraction offerings.

As we endeavour to create and promote unique destinations, it is important to consider the role of innovative and flexible partnerships. The Red River Mutual Trail is an example of a successful partnership that recognized an opportunity to turn an undesirable climate condition into a positive feature for the benefit of the greater community.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss how informal partnerships that involve diverse stakeholders can result in innovative tourism product development.
2. Describe a specific tourist attraction or destination that has successfully overcome the challenges associated with cold climates. What unique solutions has this destination or attraction implemented?
3. Describe or outline an attraction or destination that has implemented activities or events during the off-season to attract tourists?
4. Why should tourism destinations or attractions invest in off-season tourism attractions and events?

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Authors

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Christine is a Co-Director of the Tourism and Community Knowledge Network and an Associate Professor at the University of Manitoba. Christine cares deeply about the role of festivals, parks, and cultural attractions in the community and as such has dedicated her career as a researcher to exploring visitors’ experiences in these tourism and leisure settings. As Associate Professor at the University of Manitoba, Christine is currently leading a federally funded, multi-province research project that looks at the use of mobile devices in everyday and festival contexts. As well, she has recently received funds to explore how people learn about food and agriculture through tourism. Christine is committed to community-based research that benefits Manitoba; she has collaborated with numerous Manitoba festivals and attractions. At the University of Manitoba, Christine teaches in the Recreation Management and Community Development degree program. Teaching undergraduate students allows her to share her passion for tourism, recreation and events with a broad audience. Currently, Christine is on the Board of Directors of the Canadian Chapter of the Travel and Tourism Research Association and is the Vice-President of the Gas Station Arts Centre.
Chapter 6

Becoming Vincent: Using storytelling to link Vincent Van Gogh’s heritage sites physically and digitally

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1 This article extends previous papers published by EVA London (Calvi, Bouwknegt, Hover, Ouwens, van Waalwijk & van Schendel, 2014) and DeSForM (Calvi, Hover, Ouwens, & van Waalwijk, 2015).

Chapter Summary

This case describes a research and development project, commissioned to NHTV University of Applied Sciences (Breda, the Netherlands) by several regional, tourism organizations in Brabant, a province in the south of the Netherlands. The aim of the project was to draft a narrative concept and storylines that would link and upgrade the various Vincent Van Gogh heritage sites in the area in order to eventually attract international tourists to the province, especially in view of the commemoration of Van Gogh’s 125th death anniversary in 2015. In the creative phase we used a 12 steps storytelling model (Bouma, 2010). This is based on Campbell’s “Monomyth” (1945). It applies to many great tales and chronologically orders the (metaphorical) steps that drive the “hero” in his actions. We compared the 12 steps to Vincent’s life. The first 6 steps, which took place in Brabant, we placed under the overarching narrative concept of “Becoming Vincent”. At various locations in the province, tourists can experience how the events in Vincent’s early life lead him to become the tormented yet brilliant artist so well-known from his time in France (which we defined as “Being Vincent”), thus making a full narrative circle. To strengthen the process of identification with the child Vincent, we developed a demo for an immersive experience with the Oculus Rift.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of this case study, the reader will:
1. Understand how a model drawn from narratology can serve to creatively develop a concept and storylines for a tourist experience.
2. Realise how storytelling can be the guideline for the linkage of different tourist destinations that are related to the same topic.
3. Experience how physical and digital elements can be integrated to provide a unique tourist experience.
The Issue, Opportunity or Trend

Storytelling traditionally belongs to the domain of culture and art like literature, film and the performing arts. But in the world of leisure, tourism and new media, storytelling also plays a crucial role in bringing about meaningful experiences. Experience, in Germanic languages, can be translated in two ways: “Erlebnis” and “Erfahrung”. “Erlebnis” refers to an “event or happening that occurs without necessarily being comprehended” (Zipes, 1997, p.132): it is the immediate, sensory experience (Mommaas, 2000; Schulze, 2005). On the other hand, “Erfahrung” denotes “an experiential moment in which one learns something about oneself and the world” (Zipes, 1997, p.132). Storytelling entails a process of expressing and extracting meaning (Bruner, 1991); it can turn “Erlebnis” into “Erfahrung”. Apart from generating meaning, storytelling can also bring about emotions. Gabriel (2000) argues that a story, whether fictive or true, is a specific type of narrative with “plots and characters, generating emotion in narrator and audience” (p. 239).

Nowadays, in cross- or transmedia storytelling, virtual and physical platforms are integrated more and more frequently for the purpose of creating unified experiences (Jenkins, 2006; Philips, 2012). The integration of digital elements into an otherwise physical experience, like that of visiting a tourist destination, is what can enhance the experience at the level of Erfahrung for tourists and add meaning for their own visit. Moreover, as normally digitally augmented experiences require the audience to be more than just passive receivers of a pre-defined content but to be actively co-creating their own experience, they can more easily bring into the experience their own emotional world. And this is precisely what makes the resulting experience memorable and unique for visitors.

The Innovation

Case Context

The case presented in this chapter describes a research and development project, commissioned to NHTV University of Applied Sciences (the Netherlands) by several regional, tourism organizations in Brabant, a province in the south of the Netherlands (Calvi et al., 2014). The aim of the project was to draft a narrative concept and storylines that would link and upgrade the various Van Gogh heritage sites in the area in order to eventually attract international tourists to the province, especially in view of the commemoration of Van Gogh’s 125th death anniversary in 2015.

The world famous painter Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890) is, in a European context, mostly associated with the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, where his paintings attract some 1.6 million (mostly international) visitors a year. As a person, Van Gogh is mainly associated with France, where he spent the last few years of his life. This is where he ended up in a psychiatric hospital after having cut off his left ear lobe, and where he eventually took his own life. Few know that Van Gogh was born in Zundert, a village in Brabant, and that he spent his childhood and young adulthood in this province. The challenge of this project lay in the fact that none of Van Gogh’s artwork is permanently present in the province of Brabant. This is what makes this region relatively unknown to international tourism when it comes to Van Gogh’s heritage.

Another challenge was the very broad target group, which was defined by the commissioning organizations as “international tourists with cultural interest”, ranging from very shallow to very focused.
Stakeholders Involved

Several stakeholders were involved in this project. First of all the commissioning organizations, i.e. the Region of West-Brabant, Landstad de Baronie and the Van Gogh Brabant Foundation, which has strong ties with Van Gogh Europe. Second, the visitor centers in the villages of Zundert and Etten-Leur. The municipality of Breda was also a stakeholder. All stakeholders endorsed the general aim of the project, i.e. to attract more international tourists to the region, and to provide them with meaningful experiences around Van Gogh. Nevertheless, there were also differences between the stakeholders. The visitor centers for instance, vary in size and in the way they are run (by professionals and by volunteers). The city of Breda does not have a visitor center yet, and the link to Van Gogh is more indirect as he never actually lived there although his relatives did.

Approach Used and the Impact

In this section, we briefly outline the research and the creative development process we followed for this project. Next, we discuss how we translated the concept into an emotionally engaging experience for tourists by using one specific visualization technology that is the Oculus Rift. We discuss why we chose this technology and why we think this is a good way to provide cultural tourists visiting a Van Gogh location a unique experience with the person behind Van Gogh, one of the most influential artists of all times.

Research approach

The research approach we adopted consisted of various phases. First, during a literature review phase, we investigated the notion and typologies of cultural tourism in a broad sense, without focusing in particular on the specific interests and motivations of those visiting Van Gogh’s heritage sites. Various classifications of cultural tourism can be found in the literature (see in Culture24, 2013; McKercher & Du Cros, 2002) but what we found particularly fitting our goals is the one developed by Culture24 (2013). They identify three tourist types: the culture vulture, the cultural sightseer and the serendipitous tourist (Culture24, 2013). These tourist types each approach cultural supply in a different way and with different expectations, ranging from a very specific and deeply developed interest in a topic, to a mainly incidental or casual consumption of what they happen to come across. Next, during the field research phase, we conducted participatory observations of the various Van Gogh heritage sites and we interviewed the current stakeholders, i.e., the curator and volunteers from the various visitor centers and several representatives from the other stakeholders involved. The aim of this was to develop an inventory of what exists in terms of Van Gogh heritage, to list the present and planned initiatives in those locations, and to verify what the stakeholders’ expectations and wishes are in the longer term regarding the use of Van Gogh as a catalyst for cultural tourism. Since no art work by Van Gogh is permanently present and exposed in the province of Brabant, cultural tourists need to be convinced that there is something other than Van Gogh’s paintings worthwhile visiting in Brabant. We also investigated how the stakeholders themselves felt about Van Gogh. One of the outcomes was that everyone referred to him not as “Van Gogh” but as “Vincent”, and that they spoke about him in the warm manner one would speak about a dear friend.
**Narrative concept: ‘Becoming Vincent’**

When studying Van Gogh’s life through, for instance, the many letters he wrote to his brother Theo, we recognized universal and timeless themes like love, friendship, adventure, but also conflicts (with friends and family) and other personal crises. For the narrative elaboration of the concept, we compared Van Gogh’s life to a universal storytelling model (Fig. 1). This 12 steps storytelling model (Bouma, 2010) is based on Campbell’s “Monomyth” (1945/1990) and the “hero’s journey” (Vogler, 2007). It applies to many great myths, tales and legends, and it chronologically orders the (metaphorical) steps that drive the “hero” in his actions.

In Figure 1, the twelve steps of the hero’s journey are illustrated, each with an indication of its topic. They are ordered sequentially, starting from the moment when the hero is first introduced, to the meaning he eventually leaves to the world. It is striking to see how Vincent van Gogh’s life completely matches these steps and their progression in terms of challenges, crises and resolution.

![Image of the hero's journey](image)

**Fig. 1. The hero’s journey (Bouma, 2010)**

In the section below, Vincent’s life story is presented according to the twelve steps of the hero.

1. **The prologue**
   The hero is introduced. There is an apparent order but you can feel a certain imbalance in the hero’s life.
Vincent is born in Zundert one year to date after the birth and death of his brother who was also called Vincent. The Protestant family lives in a largely Catholic community. His father is a vicar. Vincent is taken from the Catholic village school by his parents to receive home education. He spends a great deal of his childhood in the garden behind the house and in the countryside around Zundert.

2. **The call to adventure**
The hero is taken from his trusted surroundings. Something or someone plants the seeds for the new “idea”. There is a trigger that sets things in motion.

In Tilburg, Vincent gets his first drawing lessons from the artist Constantijn Huysmans.

3. **Reluctance and refusal**
The hero works hard, yet deep within he still has doubts about his calling and mission. The people around him are not convinced yet either, and they refuse him.

Vincent immerses himself into the bible and he moves to the Borinage, in Belgium, where he works passionately as a lay preacher. However, he comes on too strong, and he is sent away.

4. **Meeting the mentor**
The hero meets somebody who helps him in his quest. He receives advice and support in building a new identity.

Vincent finds a lot of support in his younger brother Theo. They start writing letters to each other. Theo truly believes in Vincent, and he will look after him for the rest of his life.

5. **The selection threshold**
The hero experiences the first trials in his new identity. He really steps into action. The hero now truly says yes to the adventure: there is no turning back.

In the village of Etten, Vincent commits himself to drawing. He stands up against the church and against his father, which leads to a split between father and son. But by now Vincent makes his own choices: he follows his heart and continues to draw.

6. **The new world**
The hero steps into a new world. He enjoys his first victories, but he is reminded of the fact that he is not there yet. However, he gradually becomes more self-confident.

In the village of Nuenen, Vincent fully dedicates himself to painting. Nature and ordinary people are popular subjects. Here Vincent paints what he sees as his first masterpiece: The Potato Eaters.

7. **The initiation**
The hero must now take full responsibility. In view of challenges to come he must now be truly committed.

Vincent moves to Paris where he lives with Theo. He is immersed fully into the artists’ circle.

8. **The crisis**
Hard times begin. The hero is being confronted with abandonment, disappointment and fear. He loses initiative.

Vincent moves to Arles where he lives in the Yellow House. He dreams of a painters’ community and Gauguin moves in with him. However, the friendship and collaboration do not go according to plan, and the dream ends in a quarrel.
9. The dagger
The hero experiences a moment of intense despair. He feels guilt, shame and regret. It now comes down to sharp insights. What is it truly all about?
After a fight with Gauguin, Vincent cuts off his left earlobe. He ends up in the hospital of Arles. Theo comes to Arles to take care of his brother.

10. The return
The hero returns to where there is light. He renews his search for meaning. From now on Vincent is doing alternately better and worse. He spends a long time in the psychiatric hospital of Saint-Remy but, whenever his doctor allows him, he paints. His painting progresses but Vincent remains unstable.

11. Death and resurrection
The hero stands up for himself. This is the final test. The hero needs to make a sacrifice, even if it is his own life. Some heroes choose to die for their ideals: “only what is worth dying for is worth living for”.
After a deep crisis it is decided that Vincent needs to live closer to Theo, in Auvers-sur-Oise. Vincent is doing relatively well, he is even declared cured and he paints with enormous energy. Theo however, is in a bad shape and Vincent feels deep guilt. He goes through another deeper crisis and he shoots himself in the chest. He remains in a critical condition for several days until on the 29th of July 1890 he passes away, with Theo sitting at his side.

12. The elixer
The insight has been gained, the treasure has been found, there is forgiveness. The hero leaves his treasure to the community and, in doing so, he is meaningful to the world.
After his death, Vincent’s paintings become more and more popular. Today, Vincent is one of the most famous painters in the world. Vincent’s life and work never cease to inspire people all over the world.

Through this exercise, we could associate to each of the twelve steps a different location where Van Gogh lived and where something significant happened in his life (see Fig. 2). We focused in particular on the years he lived in Brabant, which in fact correspond to the upper part of this model, i.e. the first six steps. These we called Becoming Vincent.

The remaining six steps represent the period Van Gogh lived in France, which, although much shorter, still were very significant in his development as a person and as an artist. This part we called Being Vincent, since it was there that Vincent became the tormented yet brilliant painter everybody knows so well. Together, Becoming and Being Vincent make a full narrative circle.
Finally, we associated a theme to the various steps of the Brabant period, to characterize it better, and we linked it to a specific phase in Vincent’s life to show his growth and to better highlight the journey from *Becoming* to *Being Vincent* (Fig. 2). *Becoming Vincent* in fact is the overarching narrative concept that connects all the Van Gogh locations in the province one after the other. This overarching concept allows potential tourists to experience the corresponding locations as a coherent narrative whole. Furthermore, it gives direction to the elaboration of various storylines. These storylines are meant to engage potential visitors into Vincent’s life at the authentic location where the original event in the story actually took place. Since the universal characteristics in Vincent’s life are so clearly recognizable, his story will appeal to tourists from any background, with any level of cultural interest and motivation. Moreover, the structure in which Vincent’s life is told assumes that experiencing a certain step of Vincent’s life in one place will encourage the tourist to want to experience (as in “Erfahrung”) the rest of his story at another location. In this way, a *cultural sightseer* can become a true *culture vulture* where Vincent van Gogh is concerned.

In this respect, *Becoming Vincent* as a narrative concept has two layers. Firstly, it aims at telling the ‘prequel’ of how Vincent came to be the person and the artist who is so well known from his French period, labeled as *Being Vincent*. Secondly, the concept allows the tourist to identify fully with Vincent, and therefore to ‘become Vincent’ during the experience (as in “Erlebnis”) of the story at the above mentioned locations.

Experience at Zundert
As an example of this approach we elaborated the first step of the model. This is “The prologue” in which the “hero” is introduced. In many stories, from the start, there is a certain imbalance in the hero’s life. This was also the case with Vincent. The theme we connect to this step is “being different”. In his birthplace Zundert, young Vincent felt different from the rest of the children in more than one way. He was a Protestant child between Catholic children, and at one point was not allowed to visit the village school anymore. Vincent also stood out because he was red-haired. In the Van Gogh family he was a replacement child, since he replaced the first, stillborn Vincent. These children sometimes develop psychiatric problems later in life (Poznanski, 1972).

For Zundert, the advice was to create the tourist experience around Vincent’s early childhood: what did it feel like for young Vincent to visit his brother’s grave every year on his own birthday, recognising his own name engraved on the tombstone? Storytelling at the authentic locations around Vincent’s birthplace, whether face-to-face by a “live” storyteller (such as a volunteer) or through other media, can make the experience more emotional and more meaningful for visitors (Hover, 2013).

**Experience with the Oculus Rift**

It is especially the second meaning of *Becoming Vincent* that we consider very discriminant for the success of the experience: only through identification we can assure that the events in Vincent’s life are truly felt and understood. To strengthen this identification, we therefore built an immersive experience with the Oculus Rift. The Oculus Rift (Kumparak, 2014) is a head-mounted display that allows immersion into a virtual reality with a 3D stereoscopic vision on a 360-degree field of view. It is mostly used for games, but it is gradually starting to be used with other media, like films (NBF, 2014) and with other purposes than pure entertainment (Calvi, Hover, Ouwens, & van Waalwijk, 2015). The Oculus Rift gives a sense of full immersion in such a way that the emotions associated with this experience become stronger (Visch, Tan & Molenaar, 2010). This is what can help tourists become Vincent.

Any digital media could have connected the various authentic locations along the model above (Fig. 2) virtually, for instance by showing the *potato eaters* by means of augmented reality while visiting the village of Nuenen. However, only the Oculus Rift can put the tourist exactly inside Vincent’s story, at the center of Vincent’s life.

As an example of how an episode of ‘Becoming Vincent’ could be experienced with the Oculus Rift, we designed a demo for Zundert (Fig. 3).
In the village of Zundert the original house where Vincent was born no longer exists. In its place we find the Van Gogh house, a visitor’s center with various exhibitions related to the artist. Several years ago, based on information from letters written by members of the Van Gogh family, the garden behind the house has been reconstructed to what it used to look like in Vincent’s days. The experience we developed takes place precisely in this garden, behind young Vincent’s house. When the visitors put on the Oculus Rift, the experience starts in front of Vincent’s house. They can then “fly” into the garden and it is there that they meet the child Vincent, who speaks to them:

“My name is Vincent and this is garden behind our house, here in Zundert. This is my favourite place. (background birds singing). Mother takes care of the flowers. I love those flowers. And I love to play here with my little brother Theo. Saturday, we built a big sandcastle here. Yesterday was Sunday, so we were not allowed to play. Today is Monday. Can you hear the children of the village? (background children’s voices/school bell). They are on their way to school. I don’t go there any longer. Father says I don’t belong there. Today, a teacher is coming to our home. (father in thundering voice calling: “Vincent? Vincent!”) I must go in now. Goodbye.”

We hope that in this way viewers will experience the sadness in Vincent’s voice from being excluded, but also that he really loves this place because of the flowers and because he can spend time there with his brother Theo. When afterwards the visitors walk through the garden, they can imagine Vincent actually having been there. In this way, we aim for an experience that is sensory and emotional (“Erlebnis”) but also meaningful (“Erfahrung”) in the sense that the visitors will want to learn more about Vincent van Gogh’s life.

**Implications and Lessons learned**

In this chapter, as an innovative practice, we have shown how a narrative concept can be developed based on universal storytelling principles and on universal themes that everybody can identify with, regardless of their background or specific (cultural) interest. This allows for emotional and meaningful visitor experiences to take place. We have illustrated how an innovative virtual technology such as the Oculus Rift can strengthen the onsite experience for visitors.
Van Gogh Europe is currently exploring how the second part of the narrative concept (Being Vincent) can be elaborated for the various Van Gogh heritage sites in France. The implementation of the narrative concept, the choices concerning the storylines, and the development of (digital) experiences at twelve different locations across different countries prove to be quite a challenge, and will take years. Fortunately, Vincent van Gogh’s appeal will be as timeless and universal as was his own life story.

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Discussion Questions

1. Is it possible to abstract life stories of unknown persons into something that would appeal to tourists, or is a certain degree of pre-knowledge about the person or the context always needed?
2. At many tourist sites, volunteers are involved in storytelling. How can you strike the balance between allowing them to talk spontaneously and imposing a “script” for what story they are supposed to tell (and how they tell it)?
3. What is the power of new, digital media? What are the pitfalls? Is the remediation into new media always an option?

References


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Chapter 7

Lessons from the river: Utilizing whitewater critical incident and accident case studies to inform decision-making frameworks in outdoor leadership

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Chapter Summary

A primary competency for aspiring and practicing outdoor leaders alike is the ability to make sound decisions. Risk management efforts are directly linked to active decision-making on the part of the leader. In some instances, decision-making and risk management come in the form of accident and incident response. Despite being so central to the practice of outdoor leadership, the decision-making literature in outdoor adventure education is surprisingly sparse. Students and practitioners expect that scholarly literature and formalized training programs will inform their professional practice. A review of the outdoor adventure education literature and notable training programs reveal a privileging of more linear and deterministic decision-making models and curriculums. There is little research that examines how outdoor leaders make decisions in practice.

The research study that forms the basis for this article sought to understand the decision-making process of individuals involved in whitewater critical incidents and accidents (Dussler, 2014). Participants drew on a variety of internal and external sources of information that are not wholly represented in more linear and deterministic conceptions of decision-making including: intuiting and instincts, training and education, and mentorship. Participants also indicated that while training and education were beneficial in making critical decisions, there were instances where prior training and education failed to inform their current reality.

There is an opportunity to revisit decision-making in theoretical and in practical terms. More space needs to be created for naturalistic conceptions of decision-making. Case studies represent an opportunity for students, professors, and practitioners to engage with complex situations and contend with decision-making scenarios that are difficult and require creative and diverse ways of knowing and problem solving.

Pedagogical innovations stemming from this research included the development and incorporation of a river accident case study assignment for an undergraduate water pursuits course. Students analyze real accident data and contend with complex situations that often do not have definitive solutions or decision points. Research indicates that intuition can be enhanced and trained through the use of case study (Klein, 1999; Watters, 1996). If outdoor leaders are reporting that they are tapping into their intuition to formulate critical decisions, what are we doing to facilitate the development of intuitive abilities? Case studies are rooted in lived experience and provide a distinct opportunity to influence how we think about and execute effective decision-making.
Learning Objectives:

At the end of this case study, the reader will:

1. Broaden personal and programmatic reflections and discussions on decision-making;
2. Review case studies and increase awareness of assumptions and complexities in critical decision-making processes;
3. Be able to utilize personal experience with decision-making as a means to inform professional practice.

The Issue, Opportunity or Trend

Many outdoor participants and professionals turn to the words and wisdom of Paul Petzoldt, founder of the National Outdoor Leadership School, to bring a real world clarity to the tasks, duties, and spirit of outdoor leadership. It was Petzoldt who claimed that “rules are for fools” as he continually pushed for outdoor leaders to let the truth of personal experience and reflection provide the basis for their judgment and decisions (as cited in Gookin, 2012, p. 69). Petzoldt (1984) further clarifies and simplifies the responsibilities and goals of outdoor leadership into three distinct categories - safety, environmental preservation, and enhancement of participant experience and enjoyment (p. 34). These goals would appear to be intuitive and clear even to someone who is not involved in the field of outdoor leadership. However, these simple processes and ideas can become cloudy, constraining, and contentious as educators, researchers, and practitioners try to define dynamic and complex processes.

None will argue with Petzoldt that leaders need to make good decisions and provide safe experiences and enhance the enjoyment of the participants. Yet, there can be inconsistencies between what is communicated in theory and what is experienced in professional practice. Schon (1983) discusses the “crisis of professional confidence” where tensions and problems exist for professionals when their training and education fail to inform or mirror what they are encountering in their professional endeavors and challenges. Furthermore, practitioners who adopt a narrow technical view of their responsibilities as professionals, and who adhere to the idea that rigorous professional practice is exhibited by a singular, defined way of knowing and acting, find themselves in a quandary. Schon (1983) suggests, “in the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground where practitioners can make effective use of research based theory and technique, and there is a swampy lowland where situations are confusing ‘messes’ incapable of technical solution” (p. 42). Risk management efforts and decision-making in essence are attempts on the part of outdoor professionals to eliminate or mitigate the “swampy lowlands” that are representative of unknown and unforeseen realms and circumstances and perhaps partly the consequence of poor academic and professional preparation.

Students in leisure services academic programs, such as outdoor recreation or outdoor leadership, expect the literature of the field to inform their professional endeavors – that theory informs practice. Furthermore, it is assumed skills training will also mirror what a student will encounter in their careers and that both literature and training are congruent. An essential skill of any outdoor leader is the ability to exercise sound judgment and make good decisions. Experience based judgment is a term that is often used to describe how extensive experience can help provide a foundation from which critical leadership decisions are made. Classic analytical decision-making models are notably prevalent in outdoor education textbooks and training programs and provide leaders with a basis to examine and explore decision-making and guide students’ personal decision-making processes. These models incorporate an analytical, linear and logical process in arriving at optimal
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decisions (i.e. Priest & Gass, 2005). Such models portray a decision-maker who has all of the relevant information at hand and a systematic process to arrive at an optimal decision to meet the demands of the situation.

Less prevalent in the outdoor education literature are natural decision and creative decision-making models, which can also inform critical leadership decisions (i.e. Martin, Cashel, Wagstaff, & Breunig, 2006). According to Kosseff (2003), these models are non-linear and suggest that leadership decisions involve “systematic thinking, common sense, intuition and experienced-based judgment” (as cited in Martin et al., 2006, p. 77). These decision-making models attempt to address the complexity of critical decisions and suggest that leaders must assess situational variables in a dynamic way and draw from varied sources of information to inform their decisions. These sources of information can include content that is not easily explained or diagramed and transcends purely cognitive and analytical thinking and reasoning.

Outdoor leadership is directly and critically linked to experience and the ability to make sound decisions and limit risk, yet there is little research in the field concerning how outdoor leaders actually make critical decisions and which types of decision-making processes and models are most accurate in portraying the actual practice. By examining case studies of outdoor leaders who were involved in a critical decision making process, their stories may illustrate the complexity of the process and highlight the variety of informational sources that contribute to the leader’s judgment, process and decisions. Case studies represent an opportunity for students, professors, and practitioners to engage with complex situations and contend with decision-making scenarios that are difficult and require creative and diverse ways of knowing and problem solving.

The Innovation

Case Context

Decision-making is a central competency for aspiring and current outdoor leaders alike. I am an Assistant Professor and Chair of Outdoor Leadership at a private liberal arts college in Georgia, USA. I always give pause when I encounter the decision-making literature in the outdoor leadership texts. I have difficulty using the decision-making chapters to teach my students, as I cannot seem to find myself in the literature. The theories and models are not representative of my outdoor adventures, particularly in whitewater boating, and more specifically during critical incidents and accidents that I have encountered. I feel that the responsibility and utility of the outdoor leadership literature, and any body of professional literature for that matter, is rooted in its ability to inform training and educational programs and professional practice.

I have made space for and mobilized the findings of this research and am currently using accident and incident case study analysis with my students. The cases of mention are not contrived vignettes that ask to students to explain what they would do in such situations. Rather, the cases are reports of actual river accidents and incidents and most include narratives from those who were directly involved in the cases. Students also develop case studies related to their personal accidents and incidents and analyze their decision-making processes. Using personal and contextual factors as a framework to investigate case studies, students begin to contend with the complication of critical decision-making. Students take stock of their decision-making effectiveness as well as areas where they are vulnerable. Students are able to share their personal stories and their analysis of their own cases and cases of other individuals to develop a deeper understanding of decision-making – in practice.
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The research that forms the basis for this chapter sought to illuminate the process of decision-making of individuals who were involved in a critical incident or accident while whitewater boating (Dussler, 2014). Studying individuals in a critical, time sensitive environment, afforded the opportunity to understand decision-making at deeper levels of meaning and effectiveness beyond more casual, non-consequential decision-making. The study utilized qualitative interviewing as a means to capture data and provided the case studies for analysis.

To clarify, the term critical decision refers to a decision that is made in terms of a limited time frame wherein an emergency scenario is in effect and may be magnified without an effective leadership response. Common examples of emergency situations involving critical decisions would be situations in which the mental and physical well being of the participants and leaders is greatly compromised such as a medical emergency, rescue scenario and evacuation. A critical incident is a “near miss” where the full risk of an activity was nearly avoided. An accident is an undesirable, unplanned or unforeseen event or circumstance that does result in a loss and the realization of risk.

There were three central questions that guided this research:

1. What is the process by which individuals make decisions in whitewater critical incidents and accidents?
2. What personal and contextual factors inform the decisions that individuals make in whitewater critical incidents and accidents?
3. How do individuals describe decision-making in whitewater critical incidents and accidents?

The participants in this study included six men and three women, all of who live in the southeastern United States. The ages of the participants ranged from 26 to 43 years of age. Six participants have earned undergraduate degrees, three of which are degrees in outdoor leadership or a related field. Three of the nine participants have earned a graduate degree. All participants have received formal instruction in whitewater boating and swift water rescue (SWR). Notably, these trainings were in American Canoe Association (ACA) programs including kayaking (K-1) and open canoe (OC-1). Two participants have training or certification in Wilderness First Aid (WFA), six in Wilderness First Responder (WFR), and one as a Wilderness Emergency Medical Technician (WEMT). Currently, five participants are in outdoor leadership professional roles or other industries related to outdoor recreation or whitewater sports in particular.

The interviews were transcribed and coded using the constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006). The grounded theory methodology is a viable choice for researchers who are interested in understanding the meaning of a process or phenomenon that is shared by a large number of individuals. The intent of a grounded theory study is, in addition to providing a phenomenological description of an experience, to develop a theory that “might help explain practice or provide a framework for further research” (Cresswell, 2007, p. 63). This grounded theory research yielded a substantive theory of decision-making in whitewater critical incidents and accidents. The individual cases of the nine participants were grounded in lived experience and indicate that decision-making in this context was difficult and required participants to draw on various internal and external sources of information to formulate a decision and course of action. These findings indicate processes and struggles that are not represented in more linear and deterministic conceptions of decision-making, in theoretical or practical models. This research reveals opportunities for innovation in pedagogical practice and curricular development as they relate to adventure education and outdoor leadership training.
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Findings from this research study suggest that decision-making in whitewater critical incidents and accidents involves a distinct process that is informed by a variety of personal and contextual factors. Some of the more pronounced personal and contextual factors influencing decision-making were training and education, intuiting and instincts, and mentorship.

Training and education was a pronounced theme in this study and was represented in all nine cases. The assumption was that training and education would be discussed as something that informed decision-making in a positive way. Most participants referred to their paddle skills training and education as having a positive impact on their judgment and decision-making abilities. However, there were numerous instances in the data where participants actually cited training and education as being problematic in negotiating and making decisions. Jason comments: “I had a lot of rescue skills and tips and tricks up my sleeve and in feeling responsible to help this person I was willing to probably try some of those tricks and put myself at greater risk than was necessary.”

Jason refers the impulse to immediately employ the skills that he had even though the situation perhaps merited further consideration. It is a temptation that is easily understood. If you have the ability to rescue someone, then wouldn’t you? The assumption is that the skill set you possess is the appropriate set and measure for the rescue, at any given moment. Do whitewater training and education programs promote creative thinking? Meaning, do the curriculums account for the possibility that the trainee’s acquired skills may not meet the demands of certain rescue situations? Is there an avenue in these programs that tends to judgment and when the employment of the skills may cause added risk and problems?

Further, Russell discusses how his training and education as a WEMT helped provide him with a platform and process for assessing and tending to Jackson, who had suffered a broken back while kayaking over a large waterfall in a steep wilderness gorge. However, Russell was confronted with a difficult decision of whether it would be best to evacuate Jackson without the use of a litter and spine stabilization or leave him in the gorge while he ran for help. The problem with immediate evacuation was the potential to further damage Jackson’s spine in the process. His training informed him that he was never to move a spinal patient. However, there were factors that posed significant problems if he was to stay with Jackson. Russell clarifies, “that was part of the assessment you know, he’s in this spray [from the waterfall and] in the water...within an hour, he would have been hypothermic, and have gone into shock.”

Russell discusses his decision to immediately evacuate Jackson, who had also agreed to be evacuated immediately:

Yeah I wrestled with it because it’s totally counter indicating of what I’d been trained. You don’t ever move a spinal patient- ever....But, the decision [included] all of the factors involved, and his input was, I think, really the deciding factor [to move him].

This is another instance of professional training and education failing to mirror what trainees may actually encounter in practice. It is unrealistic to think that training and educational programs may provide a program of study that will effectively mirror every possible scenario that one may encounter. Regardless, there is a distinct need an opportunity to open up the literature and training programs to include intentional space for the complexity of leadership in action.

Intuition was reported as another primary factor in negotiating complex river rescues and decision-making. In Russell’s situation, his professional training and the related WEMT protocols ceased to inform how he should proceed with the treatment of Jackson’s spinal injury. When asked what sources of information informed his decisions after his training protocols fell short, he referenced experience and intuition. Russell expands:
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Oh yeah that’s all experience based at that point. I mean I’m still following a logical like almost engineering progression of my decision-making but at that point, it becomes experience-based. I’ve spent a lot of time in the mountains, I know...the path of least resistance and can read terrain and then it becomes just all experience and feel...and intuition based and listening to [Jackson].

Russell appears to still be following a methodical process for decision-making and problem solving while the sources of information that are processed are now less related to a prescribed protocol. He is now heavily relying on his past experience, intuition and listening to Jackson. If participants such as Russell were suggesting that they drew heavily on these factors in their decision-making, what are training and educational programs doing to develop those abilities? In reviewing prominent outdoor leadership and paddling curriculums, such as the American Canoe Association’s Swift Water Rescue curriculum, there is a tendency to privilege technical skill development. The assumption is that technical skills are the primary vehicle to facilitate effective action. Alas, many decisions have to be negotiated in and around the use of technical skills, and the skills themselves have limitations. Klein (1999) found intuition to be a central informant in making decisions in crisis situations and that intuition could be trained through the use of case study (pp. 42-43). Klein’s findings clarify strategies that lend themselves to the utilization of case study to assist in the development of outdoor leaders’ decision-making abilities. Mentorship also had a powerful influence on how the participants carried themselves on the river, their sense of responsibility, and influenced their decision-making process. Shane points to mentorship as an influential component to his river sense and ethics. Shane reflects on his instructor’s influence on him, “she spent a lot of time talking just as much about the head stuff and about decision-making as we did about paddling and boats...and gear.” Shane’s instructor prompted the class to consider practically how they would address a stranger who approached them and asked to paddle with them that day and “what is the series of questions you need to ask?” The asking of the questions demonstrates an ethic of care for all involved. Shane suggests, “I don’t know if a lot of people are indoctrinated into the sport in that kind of way to say ‘hey you need to check your ego, you need to be able to say no to people, you need to be able to make good decisions.’” The findings suggest whitewater training and educational programs can benefit from the use of case studies as a means to critically reflect on experiences and to ultimately hone the decision-making abilities of aspiring leaders and practicing professionals.

The use of case studies can empower instructors to access and utilize the wealth of their personal experience – bringing to life their stories and the lessons of experience. Mentorship was a key informant in how participants formulated and implemented decisions. Enlivening instructor’s stories within training curriculums facilitates reflection, learning and mentorship. Watters (1996) suggests, “experience is always the best teacher, but short of being involved or being on hand during actual river accidents, the next best way to prepare is through the study of river accidents” (p. 159). Case study is the connection between theory, experience, and practice.

Stakeholders Involved

There are three key stakeholders related to this research – outdoor leadership students, instructors, and practitioners. Certainly, those who were fortunate enough to survive a whitewater accident and all outdoor recreationists who spend time on rivers are distinct stakeholders in efforts to promote solid whitewater safety, rescue and decision-making. Students in outdoor leadership curriculums spend considerable time practicing technical skills, attending nationally recognized training programs for skill development, and reading and discussing literature related to the field of study. Within these areas of focus, there is much discussion and attention given to risk management efforts, safety and preparedness, and rightly so.
Risk is at the core of adventure and adventures are a primary vehicle to achieve the educational and developmental aims of outdoor education. These aims fall squarely on human growth and development and authentic learning and decision-making experiences (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014). Students relish the opportunity to engage with curriculum that has personal relevance and is novel and authentic. Such ownership of learning, and the immersive nature of adventure experiences, indicates a balance of risk, challenge, emotional investment, support, and life relevance that are central to optimal learning and experience. It is the charge of the outdoor leader to cultivate a rapport with participants in adventure environments and activities. Decision-making is at the fore of the outdoor leader’s actions as they decide how they might contribute to an optimal learning environment, mitigate risks, and in some instances, respond to a critical incident or accidents.

Students and instructors need spaces to authentically explore who they are as decision-makers and study, analyze and contend with cases and stories that are genuine and exhibitive of some of the challenges they may face in their professional lives’. Outdoor leaders have extensive experience that can be powerful in establishing a mentor relationship with students. Mentorship was a prominent theme in this study and contributed to attitudes and decision-making abilities as seen in the data above. The opportunity to mentor students can be enhanced through the use of case study and reflection. Furthermore, enlivening case study within organizations as a means to assess program effectiveness and risk management efforts is a practice, which ultimately helps shape policy and instructor training curriculums (Anjago, 2000).

Unfortunately and surprisingly, the outdoor education literature on decision-making is sparse. Many outdoor education texts provide discussions and mention of decision-making, risk management and leader responsibilities, and some provide analytical and creative decision-making models and discussions (e.g. Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014; Kosseff, 2003; Martin, Cashel, Wagstaff, & Breunig, 2006; Miles & Priest, 1999; Priest & Gass, 2005; Prouty, Panicucci, & Collinson, 2007; and Stremba & Bisson, 2009). All told, there is a distinct opportunity to create more focused space for analyzing case studies, accident data, and reflective learning in outdoor leadership classroom and field instruction.

**Approach Used and the Impact**

The results of this study indicate several salient points, which inform pedagogical opportunities for reflective learning in outdoor leadership curriculums and beyond. While this study and article have been centered upon outdoor leadership decision-making frameworks- students, scholars and practitioners of leisure services can benefit from the use of case studies to contend with difficult and complex situations that they may, or have, encountered in their personal and professional lives’. A case study in essence is the attempt to understand a phenomenon through careful consideration of stories of individuals who have experienced and contended with the phenomenon first hand. Writing one’s own case study in relation to a phenomenon is a reflective practice that can assist one in connecting directly to the phenomenon of interest. Reflecting on experience creates space for authentic learning to occur (Dewey, 1938). The giving and receiving of story is a powerful way to learn about the self and others in relation to specific experiences.

Adventure and risk are used as educational vehicles to attain human growth and developmental aims in outdoor education programs. Outdoor leaders need to make numerous decisions that can have a distinct impact on the safety and wellbeing of their participants and in certain instances, some decision-making may be directly related to accident or incident response. Case studies present an opportunity for students and instructors to engage with difficult scenarios and develop decision-
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making abilities that relate directly to some of the challenges they may experience in their professional lives. Intuitive abilities, which influence decision-making, can be enhanced and trained through the use of case study as Klein (1999) suggests: The part of intuition that involves pattern matching and recognition of familiar and typical cases can be trained. If you want people to size up situations quickly and accurately, you need to expand their experience base. One way is to arrange for a person to receive more difficult cases...another training strategy is to compile stories of difficult cases and make these the training materials (pp. 42-43).

Could there be discussions and possible practice in developing skills and heightened awareness in outdoor leadership courses and trainings? What can be done to develop students’ intuition and instincts? I have created space in my outdoor leadership courses for students to examine accident reports from a variety of sources including The River Safety Anthology, a publication from the American Canoe Association. The case studies within the book document a variety of critical incidents or accidents providing the readers with a basic report of findings generally including a description of the setting, the participants, the sequence of events and cause of death if applicable. I ask my students to pick cases that intrigue them and also ask that they choose cases from rivers that we have paddled, or will paddle on during the duration of our course. Students are able to evaluate the various decisions that are described in the text and analyze the decisions based on current risk management practices that we learn in our program and that are part of larger nationally recognized curriculums such as the American Canoe Association’s swift water rescue curriculum.

In my experience student analysis many times comes from a distant place of knowing and their critiques and solutions can be underdeveloped and often do not include a discussion of the intricacies and depth of challenge that many individuals in the case studies may have experienced. It is powerful for students to paddle the same rivers and see the rapids and locations where the case studies were situated. Many times these locations are underwhelming at first glance and students struggle to understand how an accident could have occurred in these locations. Upon further inspection and discussion their focus begins to shift from their imaginations upon reading the cases a few days earlier, and more acutely to specific input and detail – the bend in the river, the width of the current, the temperature of the water, the remoteness of the setting. Students begin to understand some of the challenges to rescue and subsequently the challenges to making critical decisions in this context. Essentially, they become more aware of their surroundings, they sit up in their boats a little higher, they begin to understand their responsibilities and vulnerabilities more fully.

Moving a step further, we again revisit the case studies in the formal classroom and begin to tease out the complexity of the cases and ultimately see if students can identify with the cases on emotive and tactile levels. ‘What are some difficult decisions you have had to make in your life?’ is a question that naturally arises and students begin to search their own life history for ways to identify with and make sense of difficult cases – in others’ lives and in their own. Many of their personal cases do not involve whitewater critical incidents and accidents yet there are insights that are transferable and thusly this practice increases the value of their personal experience to other contexts – with the aid of intentional and focused reflection. Often, there are explanations for certain decisions that are not fully formed or are curious to the student, both in relation to the extraneous case studies, or in their personal cases. Many college level students desire concrete explanations and courses of action. It is a valuable practice to contend with the unknown and difficult realms of their life and chosen profession. Miller and Pedlar (2006) remark, “reflective practice recognizes that there is simply no one-size-fits-all solution, especially in those disciplines where we are constantly dealing with the unknown, the uncertain, and the unstable” (p. 35). Outdoor leadership, and many leisure services for that matter, are surely these types of disciplines.
This research was included in a presentation to the Safety Education and Instruction Council of the American Canoe Association in 2015. The mission of the SEIC is “to develop and implement effective paddlesports safety, education and instructional programs and materials that inform, train and serve the public at all skill levels and in all aspects of paddlesports” (“SEIC Mission Statement,” n.d., para. 2). The suggestions to the SEIC included making space in the curriculum for the utilization of the whitewater incident and accident case studies to develop and enhance mentorship opportunities between instructors and students, and for the curriculum to move beyond technical skills into processing how the skills were or may have been utilized in difficult cases. Opportunities for students and instructors to explore the limitations of some of the skills in the curriculum in addition to that value of enhancing intuitive abilities and creative problem solving, were also suggested as possible curriculum amendments.

Implications & Lessons learned

Participants in this study clearly indicated that training and education had considerable influence in their decision-making process. All of the participants in this study had formal training in whitewater paddling and rescue, with seven of the nine participants having served in instructional roles. In addition, the personal and contextual categories including intuiting and instincts, group dynamics, and ethics, mentorship and responsibility, revealed data that underscored the challenges and difficulties of making decisions in whitewater critical incidents and accidents. These categories also lend themselves to training and education. Training and education is where the utility of theory may be realized.

Data suggested that there are several key implications for the audit and possible amendment of training and educational curriculums related to whitewater rescue. Whitewater training and educational programs need to contend with the following potential realities as revealed in this study:

- Training and educational programs can positively influence one's ability to make decisions and negotiate rescue efforts in whitewater critical incidents and accidents
- The skills acquired in training and educational programs, in addition to the sense of responsibility one may feel as a result of participating in a training and educational program, may limit one's ability to make sound decisions in whitewater critical incidents and accidents in both professional and solo recreational boating
- Training and educational programs may not provide all of the information that one will need to negotiate certain whitewater critical incidents and accidents
- Individuals involved in whitewater critical incidents draw on multiple sources of information to make decisions, such as intuition and instincts, which may not be represented in training and educational programs
- The skills learned in training and educational programs have a “shelf life” and need to be practiced on a continual basis to have future relevance in an actual critical incident or accident
- Training and educational programs have access to instructors with intimate familiarity of whitewater paddling and rescue. Including their stories in the programs can enliven and develop intimate knowing and connection to the curriculum
- Positive instructor mentorship and role modeling can have a significant impact on the behaviors and attitudes that students develop and is strengthened through extended program exposure

The implications and lessons learned from this research are relative to the study and practice of outdoor leadership specifically and generally to leisure services. Case studies are a way to critically reflect with elements of our profession that are not wholly captured through some theoretical conceptions. Such intentional reflection and analysis can create
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conversations that help students, instructors and practitioners, access the value of their personal experiences more fully. In closing, Schon (1998) aptly encourages:

Let us then reconsider the question of professional knowledge; let us stand the question on it’s head. If the model of technical rationality is incomplete in that it fails to account for practical competence in “divergent” situations, so much the worse for the model. Let us search, instead, for an epistemology of practice in the implicit in the artistic, intuitive processes, which some practitioners do bring to situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflict. (p. 49)

Discussion Questions

1. What is a complex and challenging case that you and your colleagues contend with in your profession?
2. How does the professional body of literature in our field discuss, analyze and problem solve in regards to key critical issues?
3. How has or how might the use of case study, including your personal cases, lend insight to new ideas, perspectives and strategies related to critical issues in your profession?

References


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Chapter 8

Supporting informed destination development using visitor intelligence

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Chapter Summary

Having an understanding of the profile of visiting markets can assist destinations to make informed and effective marketing investments. This case study describes a collaborative model to design and pilot a community-based visitor experience study on Vancouver Island intended to create a system for ongoing, local data for tourism development. Initiated in 2013 by two communities and Vancouver Island University, the model expanded across the island to 9 communities by 2015 due to its success and community buy in. The model intercepts visitors on their trip asking them to complete a ballot with their email address in exchange for a chance to win a set of attractive prizes from the destination. In exchange, visitors are later sent a web based survey by email asking about their experience, preferences, satisfaction and characteristics. The project has enabled participating communities to learn more about their visitors and to enhance their marketing intelligence. The project is evaluated with communities annually at a meeting where refinements are made for successive years. This project highlights that systems to provide locally relevant data on visitors are valuable to assist communities to allocate their scarce marketing dollars effectively. The case study describes the elements in the design of the model, the process used to gather data, the tools used to share results and the feedback from the community stakeholders involved. Insights gained are valuable to those interested in modernizing data collection on visitors at the community or regional level.

Learning Objectives:

1. To articulate the importance of visitor intelligence data in tourism business and destination development.
2. To identify challenges and gaps that exist in current visitor intelligence research;
3. To describe a multi partner initiative that has provided locally relevant, ongoing visitor data to small and mid-sized communities in the Vancouver Island region since 2013.
The Issue, Opportunity or Trend

Communities that are serious about tourism need to obtain and use market research to understand who their current visitors are and how satisfied they are with their experience. Having access to local visitor data provides numerous benefits to the range of tourism stakeholders in a destination. Armed with research data, destination marketing organizations (DMO’s) are able to maximize the return on investment of their often limited and unstable marketing funds by participating in programs that align with their desired target markets. Tourism businesses can use the evidence of consumer demand to make strategic decisions enabling the growth of their business, or to assist obtaining financial support from funding institutions. Municipal bodies are able to identify the types of activities that visitors engage in and their relative satisfaction with community infrastructure and amenities. And collectively, all stakeholders can utilize marketing intelligence to design tourism development plans including strategic initiatives to satisfy current visitors or tap into new markets.

While these benefits may seem obvious to some, the reality is that very few communities have developed a system to obtain information from their visitors on an ongoing basis. This is particularly true of many rural areas at early stages of tourism development. Unfortunately, these destinations often have limited budgets for marketing and a lack of intellectual capital to undertake much needed market research. In the absence of local market data, they often rely on macro level data sources on visitors in urban areas, or from provincial and national sources. This data is unlikely to represent the profile of their own visitors and if used to guide decisions, could result in risky and ineffective investments for the communities.

There is a need for tourism researchers to design models to gather visitor data at the community level on an ongoing basis that results in enhanced marketing intelligence for stakeholders. The purpose of this case study is to describe the design and implementation of an innovative and successful model developed by multiple tourism stakeholders on Vancouver Island, Canada. After highlighting some insights from the literature, the context of the case study will be described and then details on the design and implementation of the model will be detailed including the outcomes that have emerged.

Literature

The literature on visitor experience has expanded rapidly in recent years (Sharpley & Stone, 2010) largely in response to the growing interest in understanding the multi-dimensional nature of experience. Tourism researchers have made tremendous contributions to understand the nature of the visitor experience including tourist satisfaction (Alegre & Garau, 2010; Rucks & Geissler, 2011; Zabkar et al, 2010), segmentation, psychographics and niche markets (Andriotis & Agiomirgianakis, 2008; Arimond et al, 2003; Canadian Tourism Commission, 2015) and spatial analysis (Edwards & Griffin, 2013). Additionally, the focus on methodological advancements in this research has also expanded the ability of researchers to analyse and interpret visitor data (Stradling et al, 2007; Priporas & Vassiliadis, 2013).

Many of the studies used to produce this knowledge are conducted as single investigations on visitors with the intent of enhancing academic knowledge about visitor experience. While useful and necessary, there remains a need to ensure that those involved in destination marketing can access visitor research to improve their investment decisions (Liburd, 2011)). In particular, destinations require enhanced knowledge about the origin of their visitors, their satisfaction levels, travel activities, spending and trip planning behaviors to enable them to make more informed investments in tourism marketing. Despite the numerous opportunities that exist for academics and destination marketing organizations to work together to combine their resources and skill sets to gather, share and utilize visitor research, there are limited examples of collaboration in the literature. This case study contributes to this gap and may inspire further knowledge exchange in destination marketing as called for by Hudson (2013).
The Innovation

Case Context

Vancouver Island, British Columbia relies heavily on tourism as a core contributor to the economy. The region provides visitors with adventure, culinary and agritourism experiences in both terrestrial and marine settings. Despite the fact that the last provincial visitor research was undertaken in British Columbia in 1995, the Vancouver Island region has been proactive in researching and profiling its visitors. In 2003, a region wide visitor research model provided tourism stakeholders with comprehensive data on visitors in all four seasons. Then, in 2008, a region wide study provided updated information on visitors led by the regional DMO Tourism Vancouver Island. While useful, these efforts relied on significant funding from external sources and as such, have been difficult to maintain on an ongoing basis. Additionally, these regional studies were not focused on providing individual communities with results on their visitors per se. Many of the communities in the region are small and at early stages of tourism development and support for continuous investment in tourism by local government varies widely. As such the budgets to invest in tourism marketing or market research are often limited and highly unstable, and the capacity to undertake market research among staff members (if they exist) is usually quite weak. While the regional economy highlights opportunities for growth of small business, tourism businesses often have difficulty obtaining financing due to their inability to provide evidence of visitor demand in their business plans. While significant investments in tourism have been made, they have largely been based on outdated visitor data, one-off studies by consultants, and guesswork.

In an effort to address these systemic issues and enhance the availability of marketing intelligence, researchers piloted a visitor experience study (VES) with the City of Nanaimo and the community of Tofino in 2013. After a successful pilot, the model was refined and expanded in 2014 to include the community of Ucluelet and the Cowichan Valley, and in 2015 to include nine communities in the Vancouver Island region (see figure 1). The innovative model was developed using a collaborative approach with multiple stakeholders who shared an interest in understanding community and regional visitor experience.

Figure 1: Map of the study region: Vancouver Island, BC
Stakeholders Involved

The success of this innovation is due in large part to the collaboration of multiple stakeholders who share an interest in community and regional tourism development. The original model was designed as part of a Cooperative Work placement by a fourth year student Nichola Evernden at Vancouver Island University who worked with her supervisor Dr. Nicole Vaugeois and the Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO) of Tourism Nanaimo and Tourism Tofino. After the success of this pilot in 2013, the partnership sought the skills of a private consultancy called the Sociable Scientists to help expand the model with additional communities. In 2014, the model was expanded to include the community of Ucluelet and the Cowichan Valley, and following that in 2015, additional communities included Port Alberni, Parksville, Qualicum Beach, Courtenay, Campbell River, and the communities within the sub-region of North Vancouver Island.

Each of the partners in this initiative have a clear role in the VES (see figure 2). The Community DMO initiates the study within their community when they are seeking market research. They are also responsible for encouraging buy in from local businesses, selecting ballot locations, providing input on the survey and determining and obtaining incentive prizes. The Sociable Scientists signs a contract with each community and coordinates the data collection process. The University is responsible for the data analysis and preparation of the visitor profiles and assists in presentations back to the communities.

Approach Used and the Impact

The model was developed in a collaborative manner utilizing the resources and capacities of researchers at a local University, a private research consultancy, DMO’s and tourism businesses. The model’s innovative design incorporates the participation of businesses, the use of pre-consent ballots, incentive prizes and a post-experience on-line visitor survey. The model has evolved over time due to continuous evaluation by the stakeholders. Its evolution is described in three stages.

Stage 1: Initial pilot

The initial pilot of the model was done in 2013 with Vancouver Island University and Tourism Tofino and Tourism Nanaimo. In this first stage, the partners met via teleconference calls to discuss the need for the data, to clarify roles for the pilot and to determine timelines for the data collection and reporting. Both communities were in need of better data but had limited funds or staff time to contribute to the project. They decided to pool a modest investment towards a salary for a Cooperative
Education student to pilot the project in both communities. Nichola Evernden, a 4th year student in the Bachelor of Tourism Management at VIU did her Cooperative Education work term on contract with Tourism Tofino. The original survey was designed based on the instrument used in the 2003 Vancouver Island study so that comparable data would emerge. As the 2003 was done using in field intercepts, the instrument was redesigned to take place as a web-based survey using Survey Monkey as the platform. The survey instrument was modified with input from the DMO’s to ensure that it represented for example, attractions and community specific amenities. The resulting survey gathered data on visitor motivations, travel planning behavior and informational sources, overall experience, satisfaction, group composition, spending and suggested enhancements.

The sample of visitors was obtained via convenience sampling methods and the use of ballot boxes at 10-12 locations within each community. The DMO partners selected a range of businesses and attractions within their community where visitors were likely to frequent while on vacation. These included for example, coffee shops, retail outlets, tour operators, visitor information centers, accommodations, special events, marinas, and parks. Each business was approached to request their
participation in the study by hosting a ballot box for a 12 week data collection period. These were often placed at the guest reception area or an area where visitors might be waiting. These ballot boxes were customized with visuals and branding by the DMO and via email (see Figure 3 and 4). In exchange, visitors were able to enter their name in to win a series of prizes determined by the destination which included both experiences and tangible products. These ballots were gathered bi-weekly by the destination and sent to the researchers who then sent a request to participate in the study to the emails provided.

Data were later analysed in SPSS by the University partner and results were shared in an 8-10 page user friendly visitor profile for the community (see figure 5). Results were also shared publicly in a stakeholder event.

**Stage 2: Expanding the model to include sub-regions**

Early in 2014, the partnership expanded to include a private research consultancy called The Sociable Scientists. This was done to allow the model to expand across the region as the private firm could take over the contract process with communities and hire Nichola Evernden (now graduated with her degree). This expansion of the model to a business focus proved to be critical for the success of the model as it allowed for a strong client centered focus to emerge whereby future contracts for the firm were dependent upon the provision of successful research in each community. Now, communities signed a business contract with the Sociable Scientists where for a modest investment of approximately $5000-$6000, the community then received the VES for one data collection period.

Based on the success of the first year and with the inclusion of a new partner, the decision was made to invite the first communities to share their experience with the VES team at a meeting where other DMO’s within the region were invited. This meeting allowed for these communities to learn more about the model, why visitor data is critical and to hear from their colleagues on how it worked for them and how they have been using the new data. After this gathering, two new DMO’s signed on for 2014 data collection including Ucluelet and a sub-region called the Cowichan Valley. This shift allowed the partners to see if the model would work in a small region as opposed to a single community. In this case, additional ballot locations were added to ensure that locations throughout the sub-region were incorporated.
Stage 3: Expansion across the island

The second expansion of the model occurred in 2015 where after another evaluation gathering, additional communities decided to participate in the 2015 process. This resulted in the VES model to incorporate the majority of communities and sub-regions of Vancouver Island. In this stage, a sub-region in the North was able to gain buy in from a number of the communities and obtain external funding support through the Island Coast Economic Trust. Similarly, the Parksville Qualicum Beach sub-region was able to gather support from community partners to contribute to the VES. This buy in would not have been possible without the success of the first two stages and the validation of the value of the model by the previous DMO’s.

Key findings

The VES model has produced numerous insights about visitors coming to the communities and sub-regions of Vancouver Island, as well as numerous insights about how to engage community based research. The model has gathered data from visitors in each of the locations with sample sizes ranging from 225 to 1544 completed surveys and response rates of 37-58% (average response rate is 48%) as shown in table 1. Since the original pilot, participating communities have continued their involvement in subsequent years indicating their satisfaction with the model. With experience and continuous evaluation, the sample sizes have increased over time.

Table 1: Data collection over the period of the VES evolution 2013-2015 including completed surveys and response rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community and Data Collection Period</th>
<th>Completed surveys</th>
<th>Response rate from ballots received</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanaimo</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tofino</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanaimo</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tofino</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ucluelet</td>
<td>661</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowichan</td>
<td>582</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanaimo</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tofino</td>
<td>733</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowichan</td>
<td>609</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parksville Qualicum Beach</td>
<td>1544</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vancouver Island North</td>
<td>522</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campbell River</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comox Valley</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Alberni</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The visitor profiles that have emerged through the VES indicate that communities are wise to understand their own, vs. regional visitors. Variables that often differ among the destinations include length of stay, visitor spending, inspiration to visit, trip planning behavior and suggested enhancements. Variables that are fairly consistent among the profiles include visitor origin, group size and composition and modes of travel used. For example, visitors in the 2015 visitor profile to the Parksville Qualicum Beach area were more inspired by beaches, sandcastles and family experiences, had 27% plan their trip 1-6 months...
in advance, and spent on average $649 a day per group. Visitors to the North Island were more inspired by nature, wilderness, whales and beauty, had 43% plan their trip 1-6 months in advance and spent an average of $611 per day per group. The City of Nanaimo visitors were more inspired by friends, family and shopping, had 39% plan 1-6 months ahead and had an average spending of $489 per day. These few comparisons illustrate some of the insights that have been gained at the community level and justify the value of engaging community based research to understand visitors.

For many of the communities, the VES has provided the DMO’s with the first community specific data sets on visitors to enable them to understand their current visitors. The insights produced on visitors have aided tourism stakeholders to make more strategic marketing and development decisions at the business, community and regional level. Feedback from the DMO’s has expressed strong support for the model based on comparing the value of the information with the financial investment required and the ease of application for their staff. The initial communities continued the use of the model to gather data on visitors in a different season, and they actively recruited additional communities to adopt the model in the second and subsequent seasons.

The survey instrument used in the VES is similar in each community, but with some customization options. The response categories for the attractions and activities that visitors participate in for example, are customized for each community. The instrument has been adapted in a number of communities to gather data on subsets of visitors, for example, those attending a special event. In these cases, survey logic is used to identify visitors attending a specific event and then those visitors are asked a few additional questions enabling the community to understand specific event visitors. Similarly, some of the communities are interested in the Canadian Tourism Commission Explorer Quotient, a market segmentation tool that uses psychographic profiles to understand visitor motivations and trip behavior (see http://en.destinationcanada.com/resources-industry/explorer-quotient ). For these communities, similar to the special event process, the end of the survey asked respondents if they were willing to answer a few more questions and if they did, they were routed out of the survey monkey site temporarily to take the EQ survey to find out what type of explorer they were. They were then routed back into the VES survey to provide their EQ type before completing the survey. This allowed the communities investing in the EQ model to verify their visitor types and respond to their needs accordingly. In 2015, the model also incorporated a question to provide a Net Promoter score as this indicator has become more valued by Destination BC as a metric of positive visitor experience. The model continues to grow in application to additional communities with the intention of moving to other regions of the province. Interest from the Northwest Territories, Ontario and Ireland has also emerged providing opportunities to test the model in different contexts. Additionally, the model is being considered for sector specific implementation (e.g. marine tourism, golf).

In summary, the evolution and success of the VES model has been possible due to a number of success factors including:

1. The engagement of multiple partners with clear roles;
2. Community buy in, engagement and ownership of the results;
3. The affordability and value of the investment for DMO’s;
4. The format and speed of the reporting of the results;
5. The ongoing nature of the model with opportunities to buy in whenever a community wants;
6. Insights gained and opportunities to learn from other communities;
7. Professionalism and client centered approach by the Sociable Scientists;
8. Continual evaluation and enhancements of the model;
9. Credibility of data due to involvement by the University.
Implications and Lessons learned

This case study will close by sharing some of the implications and lessons learned in the initiative in hopes that others can incorporate them in future research design.

Perhaps the most important implication to share is that communities can obtain data on their visitors through the use of such models. The immediate impacts of this innovation has been in the communities where the VES has been applied. These communities, and the tourism stakeholders within, have benefitted from learning more about who their visitors are, why and how they travelled to the destination, their satisfaction, spending levels and suggested improvements. These insights have aided them in aligning marketing and product development decisions with the needs of visiting markets. For example, the data has been cited in the Tourism Master Plan in Tofino and in marketing plans of the DMO’s. The data provides a valid proxy for use in future funding applications for communities. For example, communities could use the suggested enhancements provided by visitors as priority infrastructure projects and the evidence from the VES may assist them in supporting their case.

The application of this model in the Vancouver Island context highlights a number of opportunities to enhance visitor research methods in contexts outside of BC. The model is potentially scalable to understand sector groups, events, regions, and tourism routes. The design of the model also highlights the need to modernize research methodology in visitor research to provide communities and regions with accessible, affordable and localized data sets. Similarly, it illustrates the need to enhance research capacity and knowledge sharing between tourism researchers and destination marketing organizations. Where communities can obtain the participation of a local University or College that can aid in the design, data collection and analysis, there are likely many more opportunities to arrive at a similar win-win scenario. The need for this type of collaboration aligns with calls to get more academic researchers and destination marketing bodies collaborating on studying visitor research (Fyall et al, 2012). The emphasis on co-creating the study with community based partners and the format used in knowledge mobilization also addresses criticisms in the literature (Hudson, 2013).

The future application of the VES in the Vancouver Island region looks promising. The partners will continue to evaluate its evolution and plan to scale the model to be applied in sectors and regions off the island. The community data sets are accessible for students at VIU to use in classroom and thesis projects which may provide value added insights as the data is mined around their study questions. In 2016, the University plans to combine the community data from 2015 into a macro data set to mine for additional questions on visitors to the entire island. For example, this data set could provide insights on the visiting friends and relatives market, nature based visitors or any number of other niche markets.

Monitoring the evolution of the VES has enabled the partners to learn a number of important lessons that are valuable to share with others that may consider adapting it in their own context. In closing this case, the lessons learned in the VES from 2013-2015 include:

1. Engage multiple tourism stakeholders and utilize their respective strengths and resources;
2. Identify clear roles for each stakeholder in the model;
3. Gain business and venue buy in and train them in their role;
4. Consider engaging a University for added credibility;
5. Place ballot boxes where visitors are likely to see them during their stay and move them if they are not working;
6. Gather data from visitors post-experience to achieve more valid results on the entire experience (as opposed to intercepts at early stages or mid-way through a visit);
7. Use attractive incentive prizes to garner attention and participation from visitors;
8. Track and create stories from the participants who win the incentive prizes;
9. Create user friendly reports and share widely;
10. Engage in regular check in and evaluation of the model by the various stakeholders.
Discussion Questions

1. What types of data are important for businesses to have about their visitors to enable them to make effective marketing decisions? What about for community Destination Marketing Organizations?
2. What are the potential risks of making marketing or development decisions without adequate intelligence on visitors?
3. How does your local Destination Marketing Organization collect data on its visitors? Is a University partner involved in this data collection?
4. What visitor intelligence data can you find when you do an online search for your community? How could this benefit or limit tourism development in the destination?

References


Supporting informed destination development using visitor intelligence

Vaugeois and Parker


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Chapter 9

Walk to Tuk: An innovative physical activity program for Northwest Territories residents

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Chapter Summary

Residents in rural and remote communities face barriers to physical activity that are related to climate, lack of facilities and infrastructure, lack of transportation, and lack of safe and public spaces. Consequently, 42.5% of people in the NWT still report being inactive during their leisure time. Walk to Tuk is an innovative initiative which has been able to effectively address many of the barriers to physical activity for residents in the NWT through its flexible and simple approach. Walk to Tuk is a physical activity challenge that is run on an annual basis by the NWTRPA. It encourages community members, schools, and workplaces to form teams of between 1-20 people to conceptually ‘walk the distance’ of the Mackenzie River from Fort Providence to Tuktoyaktuk, a total of 1,658km, between the beginning of January and the beginning of March – the coldest months of the year in the NWT. Anyone can participate in Walk to Tuk regardless of ability or age. In 2015, Walk to Tuk had a tremendous impact on the NWT, with 2,500 participants from 24 NWT communities who logged a total of 453,442.4 kilometers. There are many aspects of Walk to Tuk that are innovative and contribute to its success. Walk to Tuk is challenging, territory-wide, web-based, allows for a range of activities, caters to all age groups in the NWT, and is a winter-based program. Furthermore, there is no fee or equipment required to participate in it and it includes a team component that is beneficial for social support. It is an innovate program that gets people in the Sub-Arctic and Arctic physically active in large numbers.

Learning Objectives:

At the end of this chapter readers should be able to:

1. Understand the processes that are involved with organizing Walk to Tuk to the extent that they could organize a similar initiative in their own community.
2. Explain the steps that are taken by the Northwest Territories Recreation and Parks Association (NWTRPA) to reduce the barriers to physical activity for NWT to enable residents to participate in Walk to Tuk.
3. Understand the unique cultural, geographical, linguistic, and demographic factors of the NWT that leisure providers need to consider when creating and delivering a program or initiative in the NWT.
The Issue, Opportunity or Trend

Walk to Tuk is a physical activity challenge that is run on an annual basis by the Northwest Territories Recreation and Parks Association (NWTRPA). It encourages community members, schools, and workplaces to form teams of between 1-20 people to conceptually ‘walk the distance’ of the Mackenzie River from Fort Providence to Tuktoyaktuk, a total of 1,658km, between the beginning of January and the beginning of March – the coldest months of the year in the NWT. It is an innovate program that gets people in the Sub-Arctic and Arctic physically active in large numbers. As such, it is a program that deserves attention and recognition.

The Northwest Territories (NWT) has a greater number of people, 12 years of age and over, who are physically active during leisure time (57.5%) than the national average in Canada (53.7%) (Statistics Canada, 2015). While this statistic is promising, 42.5% of people in the NWT still report being inactive during their leisure time (Statistics Canada, 2015). Physical inactivity can have many devastating consequences, such as premature death, chronic disease, and disability, all of which have significant economic costs (Health Canada, 2011). As such, innovative opportunities, such as Walk to Tuk, to increase physical activity participation for residents in the NWT are very important. There are many physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual health benefits of physical activity for youth, adults, and older adults, which are the populations that Walk to Tuk targets.

For children and youth aged 5-17 years old, the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines recommend sixty minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity daily (CSEP, 2012). The physical benefits of this include decreasing risk of high blood pressure, improved cardiovascular fitness, decrease risk of being overweight or obese, growing stronger, and increased bone mineral density (CSEP, 2012; Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010). The mental and emotional benefits of participating in physical activity for this age group include a decreased risk of depression, greater ability to perform well in school, feeling happier, improving self-confidence, and learning new skills (CSEP, 2012; Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010).

For adults aged 18-64 years old, the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines recommend 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity aerobic physical activity per week and two days per week of muscle and bone strengthening activities (CSEP, 2012). The physical benefits of participating in physical activity for adults are a reduced risk of many diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, obesity, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, and arthritis (CSEP, 2012; Warburton, Katzmarzyk, Rhodes, & Shephard, 2007). The mental and emotional benefits of physical activity participation for this population include decreased risk of depression, reduction in anxiety symptoms, and increased global self-esteem (CSEP, 2012; Warburton et al., 2007).

For older adults aged 65 years and older, the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines recommend the same amount of physical activity as they do for adults aged 18-64 years old (CSEP, 2012); however, there are additional benefits that are specific to older adults. These include reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease and premature death, maintaining mobility, improving or maintaining body weight, improving fitness, and maintaining bone health, and thus, maintaining independence (CSEP, 2012; Paterson, Jones, & Rice, 2007). The mental and emotional benefits of physical activity for older adults are maintaining mental health, reducing risk of depression, and improving quality of life (King & King, 2010). Even for older adults who are just beginning to be active in their older age after a lifetime of sedentary behaviour, participating in physical activity can produce a number of health benefits (King & King, 2010).

For members of all age groups, participating in physical activity programs, such as Walk to Tuk, has many social benefits. They include having the opportunity to participate in something with family, friends, and community members; it reduces the
chances of being isolated in one’s home, especially in the winter months; and it provides the opportunity to meet new people with similar interests (Tremblay, 2015). Additionally, the spiritual benefits of a physical activity initiative like Walk to Tuk are very significant. While many physical activity initiatives are run indoors in recreation or community centres, Walk to Tuk encourages people to participate in activities outdoors and on the land, which is meaningful for many northerners, but especially Aboriginal peoples as they have many cultural and spiritual connections to the land (Assembly of First Nations, n.d.). While there are many benefits to participating in physical activity, numerous barriers exist that can prevent people from being physically active and, thus, limiting the benefits received. People living in rural and remote communities often face more barriers to physical activity than those living in urban settings (British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association (BCRPA) & Heart and Stroke Foundation of BC and Yukon, n.d.; Hansen & Hartley, 2015). The majority of communities in the NWT are rural and remote. The barriers specific to rural and remote communities include length of travel to indoor and/or organized activities, lack of public transportation, colder temperatures, reduced infrastructure for safe walking and cycling, lack of public amenities (e.g. parks, pools, community centres, fitness centres), risk of wildlife encounters, and less human capacity to deliver programs (BCRPA & Heart and Stroke Foundation of BC and Yukon, n.d.; Frost et al., 2010; Hansen & Hartley, 2015). Youth living in rural and remote communities have especially noted that barriers to their participation in physical activity include living far away from recreation facilities, lack of infrastructure to support safe physical activity, and lack of resources and interest to have competitive physical activity (Walia & Leipert, 2012). Overall, residents in rural and remote communities face barriers to physical activity that are related to climate, lack of facilities and infrastructure, lack of transportation, and lack of safe and public spaces (BCRPA & Heart and Stroke Foundation of BC and Yukon, n.d.; Frost et al., 2010; Hansen & Hartley, 2015; Walia & Leipert, 2012). Walk to Tuk has been able to effectively address many of the barriers to physical activity for residents in the NWT through its flexible and simple approach.

The Innovation

Case Context

Overview of the NWT.

The NWT it is located in the centre of the Canadian North (see Fig. 1). It is bordered to the west by the Yukon, to the east by Nunavut, and the south by Alberta, Saskatchewan, and parts of British Columbia.

It is the most populous of Canada’s three territories, with 43,234 residents (NWT Bureau of Statistics, 2015). Just over half of the population consists of Aboriginal peoples, with 51.9% of people identifying as Aboriginal (Statistics Canada, 2011). There are 11 official languages in the NWT: English, French, and nine Aboriginal languages: Chipewyan, Tłįchǫ, Gwich’in, North Slavey, South Slavey, Inuvialuktun, Inuinnaqtun, Inuktitut, and Cree (Government of the NWT department of Education, Culture and Employment, 2012).
2013). The NWT is a very diverse territory with 33 communities (see Fig. 2) ranging in population from 71 people to 19,940 people. The capital and largest community in the territory is Yellowknife (NWT Bureau of Statistics, 2014). In regard to population distribution, 46% of NWT residents live in Yellowknife, 22% live in regional centres (Inuvik, Hay River, and Fort Smith), and 32% live in small communities (Government of the NWT Department of Health and Social Services, 2011). The regional centres have populations ranging from 2,536 people to 3,689 people and the small communities range in population from 71 people to 2,039 people (NWT Bureau of Statistics, 2014). All of the communities, except Yellowknife, have populations of fewer than 3,700 people (NWT Bureau of Statistics, 2014). In the smaller communities, the residents are mainly Aboriginal peoples, but also include some non-Aboriginal peoples. As such, the NWT is comprised of very diverse groups of people, resources, languages, cultures, infrastructure, and histories.

**Overview of the Walk to Tuk program.**

Walk to Tuk encourages community members, schools, and workplaces to form teams of between 1-20 people to conceptually ‘walk the distance’ of the Mackenzie River from Fort Providence to Tuktoyaktuk, a total of 1,658km, between the beginning of January and the beginning of March – the coldest months of the year in the NWT. It encourages teams to be active during the challenge for the minimum amount of time it would take to walk to Tuktoyaktuk, which is facilitated by NWTRPA converting exercise time to distance.
The goals of the NWTRPA, through Walk to Tuk, are to

a) Improve the skills and knowledge of recreation leaders;
b) Improve access to community recreation programs; and
c) Improve communications, coordination and access to recreation information, best-practices and resources (Tremblay, 2015).

For 2015, teams attempted to walk the 1,658km that represents the length of the Mackenzie River, Canada’s largest river, between January 5 and March 2, 2015 (Tremblay, 2015). This year there were over 2,500 participants from 24 NWT communities (Tremblay, 2015). Of the 188 registered teams, 131 made it to Tuktoyaktuk, logging a grand total of 453,442.4 kilometers (Tremblay, 2015). Calculated in hours of exercise, Walk to Tuk participants collectively spent over 108,069.25 hours walking (Tremblay, 2015). On average, each participant accumulated 316 minutes of weekly exercise, which is more than twice the 150 minutes recommended by the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines (CSEP, 2012).

To ensure that all of the teams are consistent with their tracking and to help facilitate their organization there are several guidelines for the Walk to Tuk challenge. Each team consists of a maximum of twenty members from various communities throughout the NWT. Friends, family members, and co-workers are encouraged to form teams with one person acting as a team captain. Participants can also be added to a team at any time throughout the challenge. The captain is responsible for registering the team, tracking and submitting the team’s total walking times online every second Monday during the challenge, liaising with the NWTRPA on behalf of the team, and motivating and encouraging team members. To help track the distances for each member, the NWTRPA created equivalencies for times and distances. One hour of walking equals 5km for teams of 10 members and under and one hour of walking equals 4km for teams of 11-20 members. The physical activity that is accepted for Walk to Tuk does not just include walking; any exercise that is continuous vigorous-intensity, such as jogging, cross-country skiing, skating, etc. can be logged.
To make the challenge more interactive, fun, and accessible for all of the participants, the NWTRPA uses an online mapping system to track each team’s results. Once a team’s walking times (in minutes or hours) are submitted to and approved by the NWTRPA, the team’s total distance walked and location on the map is updated on the NWTRPA website. Additionally, there are weekly draw prizes, a grand prize, team prizes, a team captain prize, and prizes for submitting photos and stories. In 2015, the grand prize was two flight passes (for two people each) from First Air; the weekly draw prizes were Nordic walking poles, physical activity prize packs, an NWTRPA jacket, and many others; the team captain prize was an iPad; the team prize was a team lunch, and there were eight Mountain Equipment Co-op gift cards for those who submitted photos or stories (Tremblay, 2015). Furthermore, there is also no fee for people to take part in Walk to Tuk, but each participant receives an “I Walked to Tuk” t-shirt.

Overall, Walk to Tuk is a unique program that caters to the diversity of residents in the NWT. There are many aspects of Walk to Tuk that are innovative and contribute to its success. Walk to Tuk is challenging, territory-wide, web-based, allows for a range of activities, caters to all age groups in the NWT, and is a winter-based program. Furthermore, there is no fee or equipment required to participate in it and it includes a team component that is beneficial for social support. Walk to Tuk is also able to operate on a relatively low budget for a program that spans the NWT; its operating costs for 2015 were $62,394 (a third of which included emergency website costs that we explain below).

Stakeholders Involved

The primary stakeholder in Walk to Tuk is the NWTRPA. The NWTRPA was founded in 1989 to serve the needs and interests of NWT recreation leaders. Under the direction of a volunteer Board of Directors and through the work of its six staff members, the organization has evolved to become the leading recreation organization in the NWT. The NWTRPA works with communities across the NWT to promote healthy living. Its mission is “To promote the inclusion of recreation and parks as key to our way of life. We do this by supporting leaders, communities and partners through training, advocacy and networking.”
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The mission is supported by its vision statement: “We envision a territory where everyone has the access and support to choose an active and healthy lifestyle. We envision a recreation and parks system that provides meaningful support to recreation leaders, communities and partners to build healthy community settings.” The NWTRPA is especially active in a number of areas: aquatics, on the land programming, Nordic skiing, facilitating the Elders in Motion program, and – of most interest to this chapter, its physical activity challenge, Walk to Tuk. The only official partnership that the NWTRPA had for Walk to Tuk was with First Air. First Air donated flight passes as a grand prize. The NWTRPA depends on team captains and recreation coordinators in the communities to help promote and lead teams; however, there is not a formal partnership with them.

Approach Used and the Impact

The approach that the NWTRPA used in Walk to Tuk is one that consists of a simple program that reduces barriers to physical activity participation for NWT residents. Given the diversity of communities in the NWT, this approach is especially beneficial, as illustrated by the fact that more participants have become involved in Walk to Tuk each year since its inception. In its first year, 2011, there were 550 participants from 13 NWT communities, which made a total of 37 teams and walked 87,205 km. In 2015, there were 2,565 participants from 24 communities, which made a total of 188 teams and walked 453,442 km. Clearly, this program has significant reach in the NWT and continues to grow each year. Walk to Tuk’s success can be attributed to the way it reduces many barriers to physical activity participation by being participatory, yet challenging; by including incentives (e.g., t-shirts and a chance to win prizes) for those who participate; by tracking activity of each participant and the team; by having no fees for participants; by allowing a range of activities that people can include; and by obtaining support from media sources and high profile people in the NWT (e.g. government ministers and prominent NWT athletes). In 2015, Walk to Tuk was covered in many media outlets, including newspapers: News North and Northern Journal; radio: CBC Trail Breaker and CJCD/Moose FM; television: CBC North Beat and Play Exchange; and online: Yellowknife.ca, GNWT Bear Facts, YK Buzz, YK Trader, Coffee Break News, NWT Association of Communities, Local Government Administrators of the NWT. Walk to Tuk was mentioned and commended for its impact by two government MLA’s in the Legislative Assembly: by MLA for Boot Lake, Alfred Moses on October 23rd and November 6th, 2014 and by MLA for Hay River North, Robert Bouchard on February 17th, 2015.

The impact of Walk to Tuk is three-fold: it has many impacts on individuals, communities, and the territory as a whole. At the individual level, each participant is encouraged to be more active at a time of year when physical activity opportunities are more limited (i.e., in the winter months) In addition, it is a free cost program to where it is easy to keep track of progress. Since individuals are a part of a team, it provides a means of social support and encouragement to participate in activity. Individuals also are able to do any type of continuous physical activity since the NWTRPA provides a means to convert the activity into kilometres walked. As such, it provides a rare opportunity where someone who swims can be on the same team as someone who cross country skis. The following are two testimonials from 2015 Walk to Tuk participants that show the impact that it has had on people living in the NWT:

We both log in many miles weekly at the Field House. To date Irene has walk over 23 hours since the start of Walk to Tuk on January 5th! It is quite a surprise when you actually log in your minutes daily how far you walk. We both enjoy the camaraderie of the people we meet at the Field House when walking...Walking is now part of our daily routine! (Tremblay, 2015, p. 19).

As a stay at home mother of two young children, I decided to join the Walk to Tuk Challenge in hopes of motivating myself to get back into shape and to get outdoors more often during the long winter months...I was grateful for participating in
the Walk to Tuk. How lucky am I to be able to explore such beautiful territory that is literally found in my backyard! It has been such a rejuvenating experience, exercising in the outdoors and taking in all the beauty that is found in the boundless arctic landscape. (Tremblay, 2015, p. 20)

At the community level, Walk to Tuk requires little involvement from community health and recreation staff, as it comes as a pre-packaged program and each community receives support from the NWTRPA staff members throughout the duration of Walk to Tuk. The only requirement from the community health and recreation staff is to promote the program to members of the community and encourage people to register. Furthermore, Walk to Tuk fosters community engagement and relationships since the majority of the teams are comprised of members from the community and a small amount of members from other areas of Canada (e.g. family members and friends of residents in the NWT who live outside of the territory). At the territorial level, 24 of the 33 communities in the NWT participated in 2015, with NWT residents completing a total of 108,069.25 hours of exercise. Walk to Tuk has the potential to increase territory-wide physical activity levels, which could result in improved health outcomes for residents of the NWT. Additionally, it brings pride to the territory by having such a successful program, especially one that is recognized nationally for its uniqueness and its impact.

It is important to note that 2015 was an especially important year for Walk to Tuk, as it received national level attention through the Play Exchange. Walk to Tuk was selected as one of six finalists in the Play Exchange, a national online challenge to find and support creative ideas to get Canadians living healthier lifestyles, with the initiative selected by the most voters winning $1 million to launch the program nationwide. Though Walk to Tuk did not win, it received a great deal of media attention and large numbers of enthusiastic participants.

Implications and Lessons learned

Walk to Tuk’s growth and success is largely due to its organizers’ abilities to reflect on and cope with challenges. Certainly, there have been some lessons along the way, such as the importance of having team captains, celebrating team successes,
having a functional website, and communicating clearly and effectively through many media outlets. First, one of the key components of the program’s success is the volunteer work contributed by team captains. Team captains play important roles in ensuring that community members are aware that Walk to Tuk is taking place, know how to enroll, and that they submit their times. They are great supporters and promoters of the challenge – it could not take place without them. Recognizing these volunteers and ensuring that they know that we appreciate their work helps to ensure that the challenge will continue in future years. Second, it is also important to encourage teams to celebrate their successes. Walk to Tuk lasts two months; to keep interest and participation levels up, it is important for teams to know about and celebrate their milestones along the way. Third, much of the Walk to Tuk challenge is dependent on having a high quality and functioning website. The NWTRPA has made investments to make the Walk to Tuk website interactive and interesting. Unfortunately, during the 2015 challenge, the website was hacked on numerous occasions, which caused a great deal of stress and disruption and resulted in unforeseen expenses. Thus, one of the hardest lessons learned was the importance of having a very secure and robust website. Finally, as mentioned above, in 2015, the NWTRPA made a special effort to communicate about and promote Walk to Tuk, as votes were needed for the Play Exchange competition. The NWTRPA learned that it is important for communication through all media outlets to be clear and effective. Staff members also learned that a consistent social media presence is important to maintain, though it can be time consuming. The enhanced attention that Walk to Tuk received shows that there is national interest in the challenge. The NWTRPA learned that it could be beneficial to apply for federal funding and to consider “scaling up” the challenge to involve those outside of the NWT.

In conclusion, while residents in the NWT are more active than the national average, there are still many people who report not being active. Walk to Tuk is an innovative initiative that encourages individuals and teams, regardless of ability or age, to be active by walking the length of the Mackenzie River during a time of year where many people’s physical activity levels decline (i.e. the winter months). In 2015, Walk to Tuk had a tremendous impact on the NWT, with 2,500 participants from 24 NWT communities logging a total of 453,442.4 kilometers. The reduced barriers approach that the NWTRPA uses for Walk to Tuk makes it easy for many people to participate as it eliminates many of the factors that make it challenging for people to participate in physical activity, such as transportation, facilities, infrastructure, and cost. Given the many physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and social health benefits of participating in physical activity, Walk to Tuk is a program that should be commended for its innovation, simple approach, and success.

Discussion Questions

1) What are some unique constraints that leisure providers should consider when creating programs for residents of rural and remote communities?

2) In Walk to Tuk, the Mackenzie River plays a key geographical and cultural function. Can you think of programs in your community that use a landmark or cultural icon in a similar way? If not, can you think of a way to integrate one into an existing program?

3) Walk to Tuk uses the Internet to allow teams to input and track their progress and for teams to see where they are in relation to other teams. In what other ways could Walk to Tuk make use of technology to enhance participants’ experiences with the challenge?
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References


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Chapter 10
Robotics programming kids for leisure

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Chapter Summary

Children in out of home care (OOHC) in Australia are an unknown equation in relation to higher education. At present no Australian university collects enrolment data on students to see if they have previously been in care therefore there is no way of knowing the success of attending or completing higher education for a student who has been in the OOHC system. Children in the OOHC system are children under the age of eighteen years of age who the government has assessed at risk and in need of protection, by the state government (Australian Institute of Family Services, 2015).

In 2009, a survey of education outcomes for 200 children and young people living in non-relative foster care and residential care in Victoria found that 23.7% had repeated a grade at school, 60.2% experienced a change of school, 18.1% did not attend school at all, 30.8% had wagged school in the past year and 14.7% of children surveyed had been suspended (Wise, Pollock, Mitchell, Argus & Farquhar, 2010).

The University of Western Sydney aimed to address this very question by working with children in OOHC. In 2012, the KiC (Kids in Care) program was developed by the Western Sydney University to raise awareness and facilitate educational and career aspirations of children and adolescents in OOHC. Western Sydney University was aiming to address the increased university participation gap of children in OOHC through the use of leisure. At the core of the KiC club was the use of robotics technology facilitated through leisure education. Whilst the program has proven to be successful in the short term, the full outcomes of the program will not be known until the oldest KiC member reaches the age of university enrolment.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of this case study, the reader will:

1. Have been stimulated by the possibility of using leisure to improve the health of individuals in diverse and marginalised communities
2. Have an understanding of how a robotics program can be used for children in care to raise aspirations for higher education
3. Have reviewed a university that is developing and implementing programs to improve the health and sustainability of the wider community utilising its resources
The Issue, Opportunity or Trend

Leisure has the potential to develop and stimulate interests in children, to expose students to opportunities outside of their normal social networks. Children have the largest percentage of free time available at their disposal, whether this time is spent positively or negatively could make a difference in an individual’s life. Promoting positive activities and increasing personal competency is part of leisure and may serve as a coping mechanism for stress and negative life events (Caldwell 2010). The opportunity to utilise leisure as an engagement tool with marginalised groups in our communities could be limitless.

Around the world children are placed into governmental care for reasons beyond their control. Australian children in care are a group of children who have been removed from their birth family for their protection and safety under the Out-of-home care (OOHC) framework and placed in the care of the state government. Every country has a different definition of children in care. Australian children in the OOHC system are children under the age of 18, who the government has assessed as being at risk and in need of protection (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2015). OOHC provides short or long term accommodation, and related health services for children. Foster care in Australia is one of five types of accommodation options available for children who are placed into the OOHC system. Foster care is a term that applies when children are placed into residential homes with families who are granted legal guardianship over the child. This may be short term or long term, depending on the nature of the guardian and the child’s needs.

In Australia in 2014 there were over 51,539 children living in the OOHC system that required care and protection (AIHW, 2015). In The United States as of 30th September 2013, there were 402,378 children in the out-of-home-care system (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2015). In the United Kingdom, where many nationally supported programs and efforts have been occurring for children in OOHC, there were reported to be 68,840 children in the care of local authorities as at 31st March 2014 (Government United Kingdom, 2015). Whilst these latest figures are limited to only three countries, they serve to demonstrate the size of the number of people living at any time within a care system around the world.

Children in care are a forgotten cohort in regards to many aspects of their life. With the emphasis being placed on their day to day protection, there is little time spent on nurturing their future goals and aspirations for long sustaining, happy lives. For instance, children in OOHC in Australia are an unknown equation in relation to higher education. Completion of a higher education course has been linked to improved employment opportunities and earning potential (Norton 2012). However, at present, there is no national level data collected on the educational outcomes of children in OOHC, and research into post school educational experiences is very limited (Harvey, McNamara, Andrewartha & Luckman, 2015). As such, there is no way of knowing the success of students who have been in care attending or completing a higher education or further education qualification.

The Australian Federal Government funds universities through the Higher Education Participation Program (HEPP) with the aims of ensuring that Australians from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds, who have the ability to study at university, are given the opportunities to do so (Department Of Education, 2014). Australian universities work within a widening participation framework with a total Participation funding allocated in 2014 of $118,600,606 (Department Of Education, 2015). Widening participation is used by education practitioners as an interventional program to assist disadvantaged groups to access higher education. One university in Sydney, Australia is utilising widening participation funds to work with children in care.
Western Sydney University is a multi-campus university geographically located in Western Sydney, Australia (Western Sydney University, 2015b). On a broad scale, widening participation (WP) programs at Western Sydney University can be simplified into two frameworks; outreach and retention activities. Outreach activities are those designed to work with students who have not yet enrolled in university, and retention activities are those undertaken to retain and assist current students enrolled at university to complete their studies. All WP activities are aimed at students from disadvantaged equity backgrounds.

Currently under the WP framework there are six equity groups identified that meet the HEPP funding guidelines for having a disadvantage (DEET 1990):

- People from low SES backgrounds
- People from regional and remote areas
- People with a disability
- People from non-English speaking backgrounds
- Women in non-traditional areas of study and higher education
- Indigenous people.

The Australian government set targets that 40% of 25 to 34 year olds will have a bachelor degree by 2020, and that 20% of these people will come from a low SES background (Bradley 2008). Western Sydney University believe that children in care need to be included in this target and deserve support to raise their aspirations for higher education. Western Sydney University included children in care within its widening participation activities after undertaking a preliminary review of populations living in Western Sydney, as well as the existing WP programs being offered at other universities, and realising there were large gaps in opportunities and outcomes for children in OOHC. In 2009 a survey of education outcomes for 200 children and young people living in non-relative foster care and residential care in Victoria found that 23.7% had repeated a grade at school, 60.2% experienced a change of school, 18.1% did not attend school at all, 30.8% had intentionally missed school in the past year, and 14.7% of children surveyed had been suspended (Wise, Pollock, Mitchell, Argus & Farquhar, 2010). This cohort, of any equity group, is in need of extra support and resources in regards to education.

Children in care need opportunities like every other child, to grow and develop to their fullest potential. Harvey et al. recently recommended that OOHC children should be offered greater opportunities to continue in education and they found that most Australian Universities do not have any policies or programs to work with this identified cohort (Harvey, McNamara, Andrewartha and Luckman, 2015). With children in care having previous traumas relating to being placed with new families, new schools, and perhaps the need to develop new friendships, it is important to ensure they are given equal access and opportunities to attend higher education as other equity groups. Existing research suggests that part of the problem in regards to education is a lack of challenge, ambition and expectations for children who have been in care (Creed, Tilbury, Buys and Crawford, 2011).

Children in the care system themselves believe that improvements in their education came because of encouragement and support provided by their care placements (Lynes & Goddard 1995, Harker, Dobel-Ober, Berridge & Sinclair, 2003). This form of support relates directly to the aims of the Western Sydney University WP program, where current university students are employed to encourage and inspire children in care. Under a WP framework, children in care are given opportunities to engage with university students, university campuses, and higher education in general. These opportunities provide children in care with possible sources for future engagement in university education. Importantly, students employed through the WP
program benefit through their leadership participation by developing valuable skills and competencies to utilise beyond their university education (Western Sydney University, 2015a).

Leisure has potential to change individual’s lives and transform them beyond their current situation (Edginton, 2014). Leisure has the ability to educate people about current choices they make, but also for their future goals and aspirations. In 2014, the worldwide interest in robotics study as a means of engaging students in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) was utilised by Western Sydney University for a pilot program working directly with small groups of children in care. Utilising the principles of leisure education, the proximal aim of the program was to provide children with opportunities to be involved in STEM projects. With the distal aim of increasing enrolment attendance rates at university, an environment they may not otherwise be familiar with or expected to attend.

In Australia there are many robotics programs utilised with schools including First Robotics, Vex Robotics, and Robo Cup, to mention a few (Department Of Education Western Australia, 2015), however the Western Sydney University robotics program was seen as innovative in three ways:
1. Targeting children in care as an identified group in need of intervention and support within a WP framework;
2. The university had not undertaken any robotics programs with any community previously;
3. Utilizing students’ leisure time to engage children in aspirations towards higher education.

The Innovation

Case Context

In 2013-2014 there were 51,539 children in Australia in the OOHC system that required protection (AIHW 2015). To place this in perspective, this equates to 8.1 children out of every 1000 in Australia. In 2014 there were 33,607 compulsory school aged children and young people in OOHC in Australia (AIHW 2015). The Australian OOHC program provides both short and long term accommodation for children. Children are placed in care for many reasons, such as when a child needs temporary accommodation due to a family conflict, or being the subject of child protection substantiation and requiring a more protective environment. Children are placed in out-of-home care as a last resort, with the current legislation and practise focussing on keeping children with their families wherever possible. When children are placed in out-of-home care the current practise dictates that attempts should be made to reunite children with their families (AIFS 2015).

Children can be placed into five different living arrangements. These include:
1. Relative/kinship care: a type of care where children are placed with a relative or someone they already know;
2. Foster care: family-based care with people who the child does not know. The carer is reimbursed by the government for expenses incurred in caring for the child;
3. Residential Care: paid staff with the purposes of providing placement for children;
4. Independent living;
5. Other: anything that does not fit into the above.

Foster Care is one form of living arrangement within the OOHC system. Foster care is providing overnight care by one or more adults in a private household to a child who is living apart from their natural or adoptive parents. People who provide foster care are called foster carers.

A foster care household is a private household containing one or more parents who:
have undergone appropriate screening, selection, and approval processes;
• have received authorisation from the relevant Government department to enable a child to be placed in their care;
• are reimbursed by the state or territory Government for expenses incurred in caring for the child;
• are part of an ongoing process of review.

Foster carers are provided with training and support by non-government organisations before a child is placed in their care and are continuously supervised while the child is in their care. As at June 2014, there were 12,038 households approved to provide out of home care places with more than 50% of these providing placements for one child in Australia (AIHW 2015). This case study focuses on children who are in the OOHC system in a foster care household.

At Western Sydney University the OOHC program was titled Lodestar, with the robotics program called KiC (Kids in Care). The KiC program was situated in Greater Western Sydney, NSW, although programs were offered to children as far as the central coast of NSW, over a one hour drive from the university campus.

Western Sydney University had previously not worked with children in care nor did it possess the experience and skills that would be required to work with children in OOHC who had experienced trauma and multi residentially based placements. Children in OOHC often undergo a number of residential placement changes, which are usually associated with a change of school. Research shows that, while one or two changes may not have a significant impact on these children, multiple school transitions (attending more than four schools) has a cumulative negative impact on their academic and behavioural functioning, which can lead to early school-leaving (Townsend 2011). The KiC program offers a solid point of interaction and development for children to assist with their future learning and development regardless of the change in their residential address.

The goals of the KiC program are:

• ensuring students’ aspirations and motivations for higher education are enhanced
• students’ knowledge about university increases
• students’ academic potential is enhanced
• student’s family knowledge about higher education is broadened
• widening participation projects are valued by community partners and stakeholders (Western Sydney University, 2015b).

With these goals in mind, an appropriate leisure program that would engage participants via robotics at a university campus was prepared, taking into consideration students’ learning and developmental needs. Weekly session plans were developed utilising the leisure education principles of leisure awareness, social interaction skills, leisure development and leisure resources (Stumbo & Wardlaw, 2011).

The program was based on each child’s strengths and abilities, as observed by staff during the program (Anderson & Heyne, 2012). Robotics was the mode for engagement adapted across the two geographical sites, Campbelltown and Penrith to meet the needs of the children attending the group and their current competencies. At times prepared programs needed to be altered due to members’ high energy levels and desire to be in an outdoors environment rather than an indoor classroom. At times participants enjoyed a particular activity more than others and wanted to follow this
up for another session. This was easily accommodated within the group schedule programmed to meet each participant’s needs.

**Stakeholders Involved**

Non-government organisations (NGOs) that provide foster care services for children and families were utilised as a recruitment avenue for children and youth in care from across Sydney to become involved in the program. Of particular mention are Wesley Dalmar- Wesley Mission and Life without Barriers, two NGO’S who were very keen to work with the university programs from the beginning. The NGO’s were slow to become involved, with many of the organisations wanting to set their own agenda. For example, one organisation requested one-to-one educational plans or individual mentoring programs for children. The setting of boundaries became a priority during the relationships with NGOs to ensure program goals were met and resources were distributed across the OOHC community. Once program options were discussed with NGOs the next step was to look at the program format and delivery method.

Carer inclusion has been regularly encouraged throughout the program. Initially, information sessions were offered for carers to overview the program, meet the staff, see the environment, and feel comfortable to leave their child in the university’s care. Two students required a paid carer to be with them at all times due to behavioural issues. Otherwise all carers observed the program for a brief period of time before letting their child engage independently each week. It was advantageous that the carers allowed the children to attend the program on their own, as this allowed children to engage on their own terms, start to set boundaries, improve self-efficacy skills, and build relationships with university students and other peers.

Research highlights that educational disruptions promote challenges in children’s schooling that affect children in care (Tilbury, 2012). The NSW Government advised that these issues may manifest in poor academic performance, poor engagement with the school environment and with their peers, and behavioural problems, resulting in educational difficulties and exclusion, with young people in OOHC less likely to complete their secondary schooling (Townsend, 2012). Given that the identification of increased children in care not completing their secondary schooling was what initially led to the creation of the intervention for this important equity group, the KiC program was offered outside of school hours to ensure children and youth in care did not miss any more schooling than was required.

**Approach Used and the Impact**

The KiC program was offered to children aged from 8 to 18 years of age at Western Sydney University’s Penrith and Campbelltown campuses. The Penrith KiC program had an enrolment of 11 children and the Campbelltown program had 8 children enrolled. Across the programs there was an overrepresentation of males by 90%, with two females attending. There were two students with Asperger’s, two students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), two who were attending behavioural school and four who were not in care but were part of a foster care family.

The KiC program was originally advertised as an after school program for participants to learn about robotics, held for two hours, one day per week. University students who had a background or interest in children in OOHC were trained to implement the sessions and provide support to the members in the program. Support varied from talking about members’ day at school to help with school, friend, or family issues. Over time the KiC program developed into a broader engagement program where robotics became the tool of facilitation, rather than the core program. A leisure education model of
intervention appropriate to the age of the children was utilised as a framework for intervention, however at times this was difficult to balance as participants were aged from 8-16 years of age.

The two hour program allowed for structured as well as unstructured activities, all students had a computer in front of them and a robot to work on at all times. Participant’s skills developed at different paces with some students grasping key concepts quicker and more eagerly when compared to others. For this reason the program adapted to the interests and skills of its members. For instance, if a member was keen and interested in learning how to program the robot to undertake more challenges then this was fostered. Alternatively, if a member was keen on learning to build the robot, building skills were encouraged. Some members were keener on the social aspect of the club and enjoyed talking and sharing stories of their life events. Longer term these members became involved in media and marketing of the programs activities.

Leisure was utilised as a framework to ensure the social, cognitive, physical and spiritual needs of children were met in a safe and protective environment that may ward off poor health and risk behaviours before they occur (Caldwell, 2010). The leisure education program took centre stage as children exhibited their talents in photography, project management, technology building, and game design. Often the children were leading the next steps of learning by vigorously telling staff the next activity or skill they would like to develop, or demonstrating through their questions and involvement, how the program should develop next.

The program evolved from a robotics program to leisure focussed program in part due to the diversity in member interests and the proportionately high presence of learning/behavioral issues. For these reasons, an engagement strategy that was equally diverse, as well as flexible and adaptive was adopted. This approach was influenced by members’ feedback about negative school and classroom experiences, where more rigid and formal educative approaches were being utilised. As a part of this, teaching steps were minimalised via a step-by-step instruction approach in favour of a more hands-on engagement demonstration and experimentation approach. University students facilitated the weekly club with fruit and biscuits being served at the beginning of each session. The goals for the session were written on a white board to assist with behaviour management and keep members to task each week. Activities were varied during the session to maintain members’ interest and bearing in mind they had already attended six hours of classes during the day.

The program development included a once a term outing where members across the two university campus programs came together for a leisure participation activity to explore, socialise with each other, and showcase their learnings during the term. Carers were invited to attend these events along with any other family members. Leisure participation always involved science or technology concepts ranging from attendance at the cinemas (The LEGO Movie), observatory visits, museum attendance, and robotic competitions. On one occasion a little eight year old boy with ADHD who was always keen to be involved in all activities of building, invited his birth mother to the end of year event. His birth mother, whom we had never met, was so excited and proud of her son’s achievements in the program. Both his birth mother and carer interacted together around him during the event.

Evaluation of the program was undertaken both qualitatively and quantitatively. Quantitatively, members completed a short questionnaire based around higher education aspirations and the collection of demographic data at the beginning of the program. Qualitatively, observations were made of members and discussions were held continuously around the children’s needs and interests throughout the program. The program was regularly adjusted based on feedback received from the children.
The outcomes after twelve months of implementation have been overwhelmingly positive with the KiC program evolving into a leisure-focused informally structured program. Students undertake robotic activities at certain times during the terms, but spend a large percentage of weekly sessions on learning new leisure activities and skills. Weekly attendance figures demonstrate that the majority of members rarely miss any weekly sessions. A staff member from one of the NGO’s informed us that two of the student’s poor behaviours had significantly decreased during the year, due to their involvement in the KiC program and the approach taken by university staff to encourage, engage, and believe in them to undertake tasks each week.

Members who initially struggled to become involved in early activities slowly demonstrated areas of interest that were unknown to staff in the beginning. For example, one boy with ADHD, who weekly had tried to run around the university campus unsupervised, was now planning activities on a white board and displaying artistic drawing skills that had previously not been demonstrated. A number of participants (including some with learning/behavioural issues) can now complete weekly program tasks; build and program a robot to perform various tasks without direct instruction, and some participants are even assisting other less experienced participants without being prompted to. A number of participants have expressed an interest in engaging with the materials and content utilised in the program while at home or at school. This demonstrates an ongoing interest in the content of the weekly program. One of the older members is undertaking work experience for one week this year with the university engineering technician, as he would like to become a robotics engineer after high school.

The program was planned as a robotics program, with preparatory work undertaken every week by staff on learning techniques and skills in robotics in order to implement them within the weekly program sessions. Six months into the program the members were offered the choice of entering a National robotics competition with First Lego League. The group voted to enter the competition and plans were made to ensure staff understood the requirements and the competencies that would be required for the members to enter. Extensive effort was put into preparing the children for the competition; however the children did not get to the stage of being able to compete. A decision was made by staff not to enter the competition as children began losing focus and interest in the robotics competition. The competitive element and strict timelines for the competition appeared to have taken out the elements of leisure from the regular weekly sessions.

An unexpected outcome of the program is the university engineering faculty plans to run weekly robotic classes to high school students and has created a ‘MakerSpace’ for community members to access on a weekly basis, based on the KiC robotic program. A ‘MakerSpace’ is a venue open to the public, where people can utilise university equipment and resources in STEM for their own projects.

Implications and Lessons learned

The lessons learned from the case can be narrowed down to four domains; creativity, confidentiality, power of individuals, and leisure advocacy.

Creativity has been highlighted as the first lesson to be learned from the program. As leisure professionals we should strive to be utilising creativity in all aspects of our programs and interventions with people. The program commenced within the parameters of leisure programming. With the belief that at the core of all leisure professionals is the ability to be creative. Creativity is utilised through our own personal knowledge and competencies that as professionals we have developed, to equip individuals to deal with their lives. As leisure professionals we are creative to ensure every individual or group we deal with has a positive outcome from our intervention. The program was based on the understanding and belief that children are
passionate about learning, and excited by the concept of robotics to want to attend a regular club every week. The needs of the children in care as a group were identified based on past research. The facilitation technique, robotics was chosen to best meet those needs. The robotics information required to work with members was learnt by staff each week prior to the children attending the club and through the children’s own curiosity. As the program developed a current university student was located who could assist with the more technical aspects of the programs development. This proved to be very successful with the only major issues that needed to be managed was the student’s changing semester timetable and exams schedule. One of the issues that still face the program today is internal institutional bureaucracy and staff workloads. For example sometimes the members will turn up to the program and their equipment has been moved to another location, or the power is off in the building.

The program worked with children in care, under current Australian legislation children in care cannot be photographed for legal and confidentiality reasons. This was a learning curve and just another challenge to deal with, particularly in relation to the promotion and recruitment of the program within the community sector. However through the benefits of the program and word of mouth from staff working in NGO’s new members soon enrolled in the program.

The power of individuals to make choices should never be underestimated in leisure programs. When the program became too competitive and had tight timelines members lost interest, started to demonstrate behaviours of concern and they did not want to be involved. The elements of play and choice had been removed from the activities themselves. The activities then became just another adult-led program with goals that children were not interested in achieving.

Overwhelming leisure advocacy is the lesson that has been reinforced from the implementation of the program. The KiC program is an example of an innovative leisure educational program facilitated by, and within, a large institution, like a university, to reach out to children in OOHC and their families. The University through the utilisation of existing resources and experiences has been able to raise aspirations for children in OOHC towards higher education. By utilising strengths based approach with the principles of leisure education for individuals. Leisure education principles in this context are those experiences that expose individuals to different opportunities, allow students to challenge themselves, develop new skills and broaden their social networks. However it is unclear whether the program would have attracted the support of NGOs and ultimately the participants if it was offered as a leisure education program from its inception. With this in mind there is a need to undertake more research into leisure and disseminate the results not only in an academic capacity but also to the general population.

The leisure education model is what made a difference to the students. In instances where children changed foster carers and schools throughout the course of the program, the KiC club allowed members a routine and safe base from the outside world that was available to them no matter what changes were taking place in their lives. It introduced children to a variety of leisure activities that they were not aware of previously (leisure awareness), the opportunity to make new friends (social interaction skills), the ability to challenge themselves (leisure development), and develop new skills (leisure resources). These skills and qualities are beneficial to the KiC members for their future lives and the issues they are still to face, particularly as they reach 18 years of age and are able to make choices about returning to their birth families and their educational and career pathways. Referrals to the program increased this year, with six more children attending the program than the previous year. One of the university students who assisted on the program from the beginning is now co-ordinating and planning the program. With the success of the program there are plans to expand the leisure education model across other university campuses and WP programs. There is potential to adapt the program for students with disabilities as well as mature-age
students, who do not currently see university as an option for them. Programs like KiC could be implemented in other contexts with different target groups.

With the number of children in OOHC continuing to increase every year across the world, the potential and benefits of leisure-based education programs are great. For this reason, activities that facilitate the development of intrinsic motivation and lifelong skills, and enhance opportunities for empowerment and enriching behaviours in young people should be utilised both in Australia and globally. In Australia the Government’s commitment to greater equity within the higher education system will continue to offer funds to universities to work on projects similar to KiC that assist the broader community in meeting the Government’s higher education target of 20% undergraduate enrolments from low SES students by 2020 (Bradley 2008). The Australian Government spent $3.3 billion dollars in 2013-2014 in the OOHC system. This is an increase of $77.8 from 2012-2013 (Australian Government Report Productivity Commission 2014). The Government is spending increasing funds to protect children. Programs such as KiC have the potential to change children’s’ lives and ensure children in OOHC are given a fair go like other children. Programs like the KiC club can start to bridge the gap in higher education participation through facilitation of aspirational opportunities for children to grow and develop

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think leisure education had a positive impact on the children involved?
2. How can the lessons learned in this case be expanded within Australia and beyond?
3. What are the barriers that prevent leisure education being utilised in widening participation/equity programs more?

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Chapter 11

Training tomorrow’s aquatic leaders: A collaborative model in the Regional District of Nanaimo on Vancouver Island

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Chapter Summary

The recruitment, training and retention of Lifeguard/Swimming Instructors is essential for the provision of safe and high quality aquatic programs. For years, recruitment, training and retention has become increasingly challenging. The issue was identified in Ontario, Canada, in 2005, and over the past ten years the issue has continued right across the country. The author, who works as an Aquatic Recreation Programmer for the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) on Vancouver Island, BC, has recently been dealing with this mounting problem.

As a solution, the author, in collaboration with the local School District, developed an Aquatic Leadership Program (ALP). A school based curriculum was designed, allowing students to gain credits for aquatic leadership courses offered by the RDN. The ALP was a comprehensive concept approved by the School District and included Ministry of Education funding. A Pilot Project was initiated from February 2015 to June 2015. Eight students were accepted and of the eight students enrolled, six successfully completed the program, and three were hired by the RDN.

Upon evaluating the program with the SD69 teachers involved, the ALP was deemed a success. The goals and objectives of both parties were met, and the outcomes established for the students were also met. However, there were some challenges identified throughout the program and these were addressed during the evaluation process. Solutions to the challenges were explored that will be integrated into the next ALP implementation.

The ALP was beneficial to the RDN because it provided a group of trained and certified students able to apply for employment after completing the program. It was favourable to SD69 as it fit well with its mandate to provide students with alternative educational experiences to enhance their knowledge, skills and experience for future career choices. Most importantly, it was of significant advantage to the students who gained invaluable leadership skills and were well trained to obtain employment while attending school or upon graduation.

Another important benefit of the ALP is its value to other communities facing similar staffing challenges. The author recently completed a Power Point presentation to the Canadian Red Cross. It was well received and there may be other stakeholders interested in hearing about the program including Parks and Recreation Associations and School Districts across Canada or internationally. The ALP can be an excellent solution to recruiting and retaining certified and qualified aquatic staff.
Learning Objectives:

1. Recognize and understand the issues in recreation services that are specific to employing specialized aquatic personnel that include lifeguards, and swimming and aquatic fitness instructors.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of strategic/critical thinking to create solutions to the issue.
3. Explain the importance of finding solutions to the problem and the challenges it creates for rural communities.
4. Dissect the issue in order to create innovative and creative solutions that are key to success.
5. Collaborate with community partners to develop a successful program that benefits all parties involved in the process.

Introduction

This paper focuses on an issue related specifically to employment concerns regarding the recruitment and retention of certified and qualified staff in a pool facility in the Town of Qualicum Beach, BC. The author, an Aquatic Programmer with the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN), began critically thinking about solutions to address the problem and came up with the concept of an Aquatic Leadership Program (ALP) that could be integrated into the School District 69 (SD69) curriculum. This case study will further identify the problem and solution, outline the program in detail and provide examples of the application process and the program/curriculum information.

The Issue, Opportunity or Trend

The recruitment, training and retention of lifeguard/instructors is critical in providing aquatic programs that are safe and of high quality. Communities that provide swimming lessons and public swimming sessions, whether in facility based swimming pools or at waterfront sites such as lakes or oceans, are continually in need of well trained and certified staff. The most important priority of these staff is to ensure the participants are kept safe and protected in potentially dangerous aquatic environments. Over the years, many recreation departments have been finding it more and more challenging to recruit, train and retain staff for these types of services especially in rural and remote areas.

In April 2005, the Leisure Information Network released a Parks and Recreation Trend Watch publication on the topic of Aquatic Staff Shortages. The publication highlighted the problem for the province of Ontario, Canada and suggested the problem had been around for at least 30 years. It also noted, at the 2003 Parks and Recreation Ontario (PRO) Aquatic Conference, that Aquatic Staff Shortage issues were to be the top priority for the PRO to address in the Aquatic Special Interest Area. In July 2008, a follow up publication was released noting the problem was still a significant concern and highlighted the impact with the following statement, "If an area is experiencing a shortage of qualified deck staff, service delivery may have to modified, reduced or cancelled". Since that time the problem has been ongoing, presenting current and serious staffing shortages that are difficult to manage, and trending across the country. This issue can have a substantial impact on communities regarding the safety of children, youth and adults, especially rural waterfront communities.

A publication by Swim Life Magazine in the spring 2015 reported on the shortage of qualified lifeguards and instructors as an ongoing issue for the aquatics community both in the public and private sector. The article cited a 2006 study completed by
the City of Saskatoon’s Leisure Services Department that “found young people in Saskatoon may not choose to become lifeguards because of things that interfere with the completion of training” including such factors as “increased work load in school, too expensive to complete the training, the training schedule is too demanding, and trainees are not aware that there is the potential benefit of employment at the end”. The article concluded, “Research to provide insight into potential creative solutions to address issues is vital”.

In November 2014, Global News reported on St. Albert, Alberta, where the city was experiencing a lifeguard shortage and had no choice but to reduce hours. The department was in need of approximately a dozen lifeguards to maintain current operations. In researching the topic further, there were numerous cases on the web from communities like Wood Buffalo, Alberta, and further afield in the United States, such as Marshall Town, Iowa, and even as far as Hawaii. All of these communities were placing notices of operations being reduced due to staffing shortages.

The Ravensong Aquatic Centre (Fig. 1), located in Qualicum Beach on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, on the west coast of Canada has also been experiencing similar concerns. The facility has provided a considerable amount of programs and services, not only to Qualicum Beach, but also in a number of other rural communities within the RDN. The pool operates efficiently with approximately 20-25 part-time and casual lifeguard/instructors. Although the RDN Recreation and Parks Department has been experiencing staffing issues for a number of years, the problem has become much more onerous in the past four to five years. Most recently, due to staffing shortages, the Aquatic Centre has postponed and/or canceled some programs and events, and even altered hours of service.

Previously, a number of initiatives have been utilized by the RDN to recruit aquatic staff. These initiatives have included:

- attending school job fairs,
- scheduling of training to best accommodate students such as on weekends and evenings,
- provincial and national job postings,
- met with school counsellors to communicate opportunities,
- attended classrooms to present career opportunities directly to students,
- broadened financial access opportunities to students,
- reduced costs of leadership programs,
and promotional campaigns educating students on how to become lifeguard/instructors.

In speaking with colleagues throughout the years, the author has noted similar initiatives have been used by other departments. Most of these initiatives have been met with limited success. Many of these initiatives are still used, but new innovative approaches are always being sought to deal more successfully with the challenge.

In March, 2014 the Aquatic Programmer began strategizing new and fresh ideas as the issue was becoming very problematic. Staff were being overworked when they were asked to cover for other staff who were ill and this became even more problematic as the overworked staff then requested time off for sickness. The nature of the environment in aquatic facilities is one where illnesses are easily passed along through interactions with the public and/or co-workers. As well, many of the positions are casual and staff may not be available to work when needed. Also, lifeguarding can be very transient, often a stepping stone job to other things; therefore, staff may come and go quite regularly. In addition, it is challenging to recruit staff to this location. Being a more rural area, unlike larger cities such as Nanaimo, there is not a pool of University students to readily draw on for job opportunities. A familiar phrase heard over and over again during the past year has been, “we do not have enough staff”.

The Innovation

Case Context

The Aquatic Programmer had been involved with a Mr. Darin Carmichael of SD69, a local teacher who supervises ROAMS (Rivers, Oceans and Mountains School), an outdoor career education and leadership program. Mr. Carmichael had initially contacted the Aquatic Programmer to provide Lifesaving (Bronze Cross and Bronze Medallion) and first aid training to his students. After this encounter the Aquatic Programmer began thinking more critically about a strategy to collaboratively work with the local school district because they had a pool of students who could be target marketed to, and potentially be attracted to lifeguard positions. By integrating a recreation training program in a school based curriculum the Aquatic Programmer could access a pool of trained and certified students who could begin working for the RDN to ensure aquatic based programs would continue to thrive for the betterment of the community as a whole. It would be a credit based, semester program that would be mutually beneficial to both SD69 and the RDN, and even more beneficial to the students. Mr. Carmichael’s supervisor, Mr. Jeff Temple, Principal of CEAP (Collaborative Education Alternative Program) was contacted and a meeting was set up to discuss the concept. Mr. Temple was very excited about the opportunity. The concept was explored further and a plan was developed including courses required, course credits, and a suitable and acceptable curriculum for one semester each year.

Stakeholders Involved

The Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) provides a wide variety of services to seven Electoral Areas and four municipalities including the City of Nanaimo, the District of Lantzville, City of Parksville and the Town of Qualicum Beach. One of the key service functions is the Ravensong Aquatic Centre that provides aquatic based activities, programs and events to the residents mainly in the north end of the District including Parksville, Qualicum Beach and two of the Electoral Areas (G and H) surrounding the city and the town. As these are waterfront communities, the residents served rely heavily on the aquatic centre services offered through the Recreation and Parks Department.
School District 69 includes a large number of schools including eight elementary schools, two high schools and two alternative schools. The majority of the elementary schools utilize the Ravensong Aquatic Centre for grade 3 Red Cross Learn to Swim Lessons. The Ballenas High School in Parksville also utilizes the pool for recreational swimming and the alternative school, CEAP (Collaborative Education Alternative Program), utilizes the pool for swimming and aquatic leaderships programs. CEAP was instrumental in developing the Aquatic Leadership Program with the RDN.

The Canadian Red Cross and the Lifesaving Society, both national organizations, have a vested interest in making swimming areas safe for individuals and families, and reducing the number of deaths due to drowning in Canada. The RDN is a training partner for the Red Cross Water Safety, Learn to Swim and Instructor Development programs, and Lifesaving Society for teaching lifesaving and lifeguarding skills.

Community residents, who support the Ravensong Aquatic Centre through their tax dollars, also rely on the lifeguard/instructor services to ensure a safe environment for themselves and their children while using the facility. Some community residents also benefit directly from these services from a training perspective and possible employment opportunities as lifeguards or swim instructors.

As a significant community asset, the Ravensong Aquatic Centre provides an invaluable service to the residents of the RDN, especially for the four communities through which it is directly funded. Without this service many residents would sense a significant loss.

Approach Used and the Impact

This concept focused on developing young students as aquatic leaders, providing them with opportunities to enhance their knowledge, skills and experience, while achieving valuable certifications for future jobs.

Goals and Objectives
The main goal for the RDN was to increase the number of local, well trained and certified individuals who may be eligible candidates for lifeguard positions at Ravensong Aquatic Centre. The main goal of SD69 was to provide students with alternative educational experiences that can enhance their knowledge, skills and experience for future career choices.

Target Market
The program was targeted to high school students both male and female, 16-19 years of age. The National Lifeguard (NL) program requires a minimum age of 16 years while BC Ministry of Education funding is only approved for students under 19 years of age. This was a great opportunity for students to gain some quality training, experience and academic credits while attending school, which can lead to part time work while attending school and/or potentially full time work in the future. In this particular setting, the program targeted two high schools, BSS (Ballenas High School) in Parksville and KSS (Kwalikum Secondary School) in Qualicum Beach.

Key objectives to meet these goals were to:
- develop program content,
- establish a school based curriculum,
- obtain School District approval,
- train and certify students to prepare them for work opportunities,
- provide job shadowing opportunities and
- secure supplemental funding to provide long term opportunities.
Student Recruitment, Application, Supervision and Evaluation processes
The ALP was open to any student interested in applying. However, the ALP has been targeted specifically to the CEAP and ROAMS programs due to the nature of these programs and relationship already established between the RDN and these two program areas.

SD69 established an application process for the students. There were two parts to the application process. The first was a Student Application form to be completed by the student, and signed by the student and a parent/guardian. And the second was a Teacher Statement of Reference that teachers completed once a student has applied. Students were then selected based on the application information and a personal interview. This is critical if there are more than twelve candidates applying. The program has been initially developed with a minimum requirement of six students and a maximum of twelve.

Students were supervised and supported by RDN staff while participating in courses at the Ravensong Aquatic Centre and also by the teacher who facilitates their program and course work. Participation and attendance was mandatory in all courses. Students were reminded that any absences must be approved by the teacher and that absences may result in a failed certification. In each course, there were specific requirements to be met including core competencies in physical, mental and team work skills, which are tested and evaluated by the instructors of each course. The teacher was also involved in the evaluation process, specifically for online course work at the school sites. Once students received the required certifications for lifeguarding and swimming instruction, they were eligible to apply for employment with the RDN.

Marketing and Promotions
Mr. Temple and Mr. Carmichael developed a written curriculum outlining the ALP details. This document was provided to students in the CEAP and ROAMS program. Also, Mr. Carmichael, located at KSS, promoted the programs personally at BSS, and Mr. Temple attended Careers Day to promote the program to other students. These were the key focus areas for marketing/promotions to students at this time, agreed upon by both parties.

Scheduling
The initial plan was to run the program during the Winter/Spring semester (February – June) each year. During school hours, students were required to attend three afternoon sessions (Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays) between noon and 3:00 pm at Ravensong Aquatic Centre, where they receive specific aquatic based instruction and training. As part of the commitment to the ALP students must also attend two morning sessions at school, Tuesdays and Thursdays, to complete additional course and program work. The program covers a span of approximately 18 weeks. A complete, detailed schedule is included in the curriculum.

Program Content
The ALP was designed for high school students, providing them with opportunities to obtain required certifications during school hours rather than during weeknights or weekends. This was beneficial to the students as they may gain credits for the courses attended. If students require and complete all four courses they may receive up to 12 graduation credits (an equivalent of 3 graduation, 4 credit courses). This program was developed to provide students with specific training in four courses to become certified lifeguards. The four courses include: Red Cross Water Safety Instructor course, Red Cross Standard First Aid course, Lifesaving Camp (Bronze...
Medallion/Bronze Cross course), and the National Lifeguard course. The courses were taught by certified lifeguard instructor trainers, and include both practical and theory components, taught in either the pool or in a multipurpose room.

If the program were to continue, each year the program would begin with a welcome and introductory session and students would then begin the course work.

Pilot Program

It was important for the School District and the Regional District to engage in a pilot project to get the program off the ground and evaluate its success. The program started in February 2015 and ended in June 2015. Eight students applied for the pilot and were accepted based on their readiness for the program.

The students began working through the program courses, all completing Standard First Aid and Water Safety Instructor (WSI) certification within the first two months with the exception of one student who made up the missed WSI content at a later date. Interestingly, the WSI course was also a pilot program recently initiated by the Canadian Red Cross. The Aquatic Programmer is on the National Red Cross Swimming and Water Safety Instructor Development Program committee. Over the last three years the committee has been developing a blended learning program that includes online, classroom and teaching experience for the WSI Program. Five provinces across Canada were selected to pilot this new program in early 2015. As the ALP was just being implemented, it was regarded as a great fit, so the Parksville/Qualicum Beach area was chosen as the BC pilot. As part of the ALP, students were required to become certified Water Safety Instructors. This certification prepares the students to teach Red Cross swimming lessons. This selected group of students were some of the first to complete this program across the country.

Most of the students were committed to the ALP; however, one student dropped out due to competing academic commitments, and one student failed due to not passing one of the courses.

Program Costs

In developing the program, the following direct costs were established in relation to the four courses as outlined in Table 1 below.

Course fees included the candidate fee as applicable (Lifesaving Society courses), materials and instructor wages. As the National Red Cross piloted the WSI course, the cost of the course packages ($75) were waived. The full amount would need to be applied to future programs. Also, the School District was able to get Ministry funding to support students through the process. The Ministry would only support students who were under 19 years of age. There was limited funding so students still had to pay for some of the costs (up to $600) for the program. Ministry funding must be approved annually so this could be a program concern in the future. This issue would need to be evaluated on an annual basis. After completion of the program each year, the Regional District would invoice the School District for the funding.
Outcomes

The following outcomes were identified for the program. These outcomes incorporated the RDN and SD69 goals, while focusing on student benefits:

- students’ swimming and leadership skills are enhanced,
- students’ will obtain more certifications to add to their resumes,
- students will acquire course credits towards their graduation,
- trained, qualified, certified, students who are deck ready for aquatic job opportunities.

ALP Evaluation Process

The RDN and SD69 developed an evaluation process to identify whether or not the program was effective, the goals and objectives were achieved, the outcomes were met, and based on the challenges and feedback, what may need to change to enhance the program. Key components of the evaluation process include the following:

- feedback forms from students, parent/guardians, and instructors,
- success rate measured by pass/failure ratio of students (deck ready candidates),
- meeting with RDN and SD69 representatives to evaluate the pilot program and consider changes necessary to maintain the success of the program.

Implications and Lessons learned

Once the ALP Pilot Project was completed in June, the evaluation process was initiated to review the outcomes and successes, the challenges, and the future of the program.

The Aquatic Programmer met with the Mr. Temple and Mr. Carmichael in late June 2015. In reviewing the goals and objectives and the outcomes of the ALP, all were achieved through the Pilot Project. SD69 succeeded in its goal of providing students with alternative educational experiences that enhanced their knowledge, skills and experience for future career choices, and the majority of the students attained the benefits outlined in the outcomes including certifications, course credits and potential employment opportunities. The RDN was able to increase the number of local, well trained and certified individuals who may be eligible candidates for lifeguard positions at Ravensong Aquatic Centre. In fact, four of the six students who completed the program applied for positions with the RDN. Three of these students were hired between July and October 2015. This success rate was considered a very satisfying result for the Pilot.
The only objective that could not clearly be perceived as a success was the funding component for the students through the Ministry of Education. Long term funding can only be achieved on an annual basis so until the next ALP is implemented, the question of long term funding will remain unanswered.

The Aquatic Programmer also met with staff to get their feedback. Staff believed this concept was a good initiative to increase the number of trained Lifeguard/Swimming Instructors for future employment. They enjoyed the process for the most part; however, they did agree the scheduling of three hour blocks was challenging.

In speaking with Mr. Carmichael and the Aquatic Team Leader, they noted the majority of students had appreciated the opportunity to do the Pilot Project and were pleased with their successes in the training. However, the students also expressed concerns about the scheduling.

Scheduling was certainly one of the key challenges identified throughout the Pilot Project, but there were also a number of other challenges identified. The following highlights the key challenges addressed at the evaluation meeting:

• **Student schedules** - Most leadership courses are run in 4-8 hour blocks of time; however, students needed to be accommodated within school hours, so there was a program limitation of three-hour blocks provided within the school day schedule. This was a new concept to aquatic staff and they found the courses choppy and somewhat more challenging to teach in the shorter blocks. To resolve this concern, the ALP will run with a minimum of four-hour blocks.

• **Transportation** – Transportation was an issue for students coming from the Ballenas High School in Parksville. Some students did not have their own transportation and found it difficult to get to the Aquatic Centre in Qualicum Beach. Two alternative ideas will be explored including the use of the RDN 15 passenger van with a volunteer driver or meeting with transit to consider changing the bus schedule and route to better accommodate Ballenas High School students.

• **Lack of students’ swimming skills** - The majority of students lacked the swimming expertise required for the WSI course; therefore, more time was needed to improve their skills to bring them to the required standard. The schedule had to be revised; however, in the future a prerequisite of a 100-meter swim will be mandatory, and a Learn to Swim course will be included.

• **Communication** - one of the concerns addressed was the lack of communication between the RDN and SD69 during the Pilot Project. It was agreed that opportunities to meet regularly between RDN and SD69 staff would be beneficial to keep both parties up to date on any successes, issues, challenges and/or changes necessary. Bi-weekly meetings would be considered. Also, due to the online component of the ALP, there were a considerable number of questions from the students. As the students were offsite, communication was challenging. To resolve this issue, a closed Facebook Group page was created by the Aquatic Team Leader for students and instructors, providing more effective communication amongst the group. This initiative was well received by the teachers, instructors and staff.

• **Lack of qualified staff to teach** - Due to the issue of staffing as identified in this paper, it resulted in some staffing problems for running the courses for the students. This was a concern, but the problem was managed successfully and the RDN will continue to do so to the best of its resources.
• **Students’ missing classes** - Students involved in the program were very busy with other competing course requirements, which made it sometimes difficult for them to make choices about what course to prioritize. They were supposed to be committed to this program because of the certification, but other course requirements become priorities and a class or two of the ALP was missed. When this happened it created more challenges in working with the students to complete the program. Once consideration to remedy this problem is to schedule in make up classes so students can more effectively deal with their commitment to the ALP and other academic requirements. Also, the schedule will be presented to the candidates prior to recruitment so they have a realistic awareness of the commitment.

• **Funding** - The cost of the program was considerable for young students. It can create a barrier so this will have to be explored in the future. The main concern is whether or not Ministry funding will continue to be accessible each year. If this funding is not available, it could potentially create further difficulties for students to participate in the program.

With the evaluation complete, plans are now in the works for the next ALP to be implemented in 2016. The ALP may also be modified to suit other similar situations, such as Skate Leaders. The Aquatic Programmer has started discussing strategies with a co-worker, the Arena Programmer, to see how it might assist her in dealing with the same issue. The program could also be valuable for other departments to consider for their facilities, and the Red Cross may have interest in it as well. As previously mentioned, the Aquatic Programmer made a presentation to the Canadian Red Cross. This occurred on March 26, 2015. The presentation was well received, and Red Cross representatives at that time recommended the ALP Power Point be presented at future Ripple Effects Aquatic Workshop. There may also be an opportunity to present the information to the British Columbia Parks and Recreation Association and the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, as well as the Lifesaving Society. The program can also be shared easily with other Parks and Recreation Departments across the country and internationally.

Having been involved with aquatics for the past 45 years and the Red Cross Swimming Program for 25 years, the Aquatic Programmer strongly believed this approach would help fill the labour shortage issue and get young people excited about the area of aquatics as a job opportunity or career. The provision of the ALP was definitely considered a win/win situation for all parties involved and if the success of the Pilot Project was any indication of its potential, the future will only serve to enrich its purpose.

**Discussion Questions**

1. What other innovative and/or collaborative solutions to the challenge of recruitment, training and retention of specialized aquatic personnel have been successfully implemented?
2. Are there other key stakeholders in the community that are looking for innovative ways to engage youth in career based learning experiences that could be involved in the process?
3. What alternative methods could be implemented to enhance an Aquatic Leadership Program that may work more effectively for all parties involved, especially with respect to scheduling?
4. How can we more effectively encourage and engage youth in considering lifeguarding and instructing as viable sources of employment?
5. What are the ways in which we can break down the barriers and challenges that hinder youth in participating in these types of training programs?
References


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Anne Porteous currently works for the Regional District of Nanaimo Recreation and Parks Department as an Aquatic Recreation Programmer. She has worked in the field of aquatics for over thirty-five years and during this time she has been professionally and personally involved with the Canadian Red Cross National Swimming and Water Safety Service. For the past five years, Anne has been a member on two national Red Cross Aquatic Committees including the Instructor Development Program and the Water Safety Technical Advisory Group assisting in aquatic program development and water safety training. Her commitment to the Red Cross and her expertise has afforded Anne opportunities to visit China three years consecutively (2010-13) as part of a Canadian delegation to develop a Red Cross Swimming and Water Safety program in two different Provinces. As a Recreation Programmer, Anne has worked with various community organizations over the past fifteen years in the Regional District of Nanaimo to provide quality, aquatic based services. Her most recent project has been the development of an Aquatic Leadership Program, working in collaboration with School District 69 to provide local employment training and opportunities for young people interested in lifeguarding and swimming instruction. Email: APorteous@rdn.bc.ca