

# Native American communities and tourism as development: Pine Ridge Reservation case study

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## Introduction

Although tourism as a form of economic development has frequently proven detrimental for the people being “developed” in terms of the community and environment, there is promise for indigenous tourism in the United States and Canada.<sup>1-17</sup> Tourism as a form of economic and community development has worked well for indigenous communities in the United States because of their unique history and contemporary political status as dependent sovereign nations. These communities have a degree of control over their land and tourism policies that other indigenous nations do not have.<sup>1,3,6-8,10,11,13-18</sup> Canadian First Peoples do not have the same relationship with the Canadian government as do indigenous communities in the United States but there is evidence that tourism, initiated and controlled by First Nations communities, can be used to support land claims for communities without land ownership.<sup>3,10,11</sup>

This paper will review the available literature on indigenous tourism in the United States to examine both the potential benefits and negative consequences of tourism as economic development. In addition, a case study of the Lakota on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota is provided to better situate this literature in tribal experience.

## Negative consequences

In order to understand tourism as a form of economic development, the positive and negative effects need to be considered. Many authors cite the possible negative consequences with tourism development but most nevertheless argue that most indigenous communities had benefited overall from tourism development.<sup>4-9</sup> The possible negative consequences of tourism include, but are not limited to:

- increased crime
- alcoholism
- smuggling
- heightened tension between Natives and non-Natives
- creation of phony folk culture
- loss of meaning of cultural traditions and arts due to commodification of culture
- the encouragement of acculturation through cultural exchange
- the appropriation of tribal culture by outsiders
- reliance on a seasonal and often volatile economy
- encroachment on sacred and culturally meaningful sites and land<sup>4-8</sup>

Katie Johnson and Tamara Underiner present one of the only examples of a problematic tourism experience of the Tillicum Village off the coast of Seattle.<sup>12</sup> The authors argue that there is a problem in the presentation of the tribal dances as a way to travel to the past rather than as a contemporary experience, which has been cited as a concern for other tribes as well.<sup>22</sup> Johnson and Underiner argue that at first glance the problem of cultural commodification and appropriation

is apparent, but with further exploration they came to understand that the people of Tillicum Village have more agency in this cultural exchange than was previously thought. They conclude that the native people of Tillicum Village are “co-producers (although perhaps not yet equal) of this cultural experience” through their deliberate decision to participate in the dancing displays for tourists.<sup>1,2,12,22</sup>

## Benefits

The benefits of tourism for indigenous communities can outweigh the detriments if tribes are able to manage tourism and restrict tourists in certain ways. The stated benefits of tourism are:

- employment opportunities
- income generation
- external investment
- increased sovereignty
- revitalization of local traditions
- ceremony and art
- infrastructure and resources for residents
- decreased stereotypes and increased understanding of Native Americans
- preservation of natural resources<sup>3,6-8,10,11,13-18</sup>

One especially informative example comes from John Colton who studied tourism in Canada with the Woodland Cree First Nations peoples (WCFN).<sup>3</sup> Colton argues that the WCFN peoples considered many factors outside of economics in their decision to pursue tourism, including social, cultural, political, and environmental factors. For many First Nation communities, tourism is a way to strengthen traditional land-based activities and to supplement wage labor and subsistence production.<sup>3</sup> Tourism provides a way for First Nations communities to gain control over their natural resources and can strengthen land claims if the community decides to make one.<sup>3</sup> Finally, for the Woodland Cree, the revitalization of cultural traditions and the inclusion of their youth in tourism activities offers a source of hope for the future of the community, both spiritually and economically.<sup>3</sup>

A second example is that of the southwestern pueblo communities in the United States. Both Jill Sweet and Carol Lujan’s research focused on pueblo communities and tourism. Pueblo communities utilize different traditional cultural values in order to mitigate and manage tourists and tourism in their communities. One of the ways they do this is through secrecy.<sup>16,20</sup> This secrecy is facilitated through the restriction of tourists to certain ceremonies and in what documentation tourists can walk away with (e.g. photographs and notes).<sup>20</sup> According to Lujan, the Taos Pueblo has succeeded with tourism due to the strength of their cultural and religious foundation prior to the incorporation of tourism and due to the degree of control the Taos have over tourists.<sup>20</sup> In this way the pueblo communities are able to benefit economically from tourism while maintaining their cultural values and ceremonies.

**Pine Ridge case study – Oglala Lakota voices**

In 2009 the Pine Ridge Area Chamber of Commerce (PRACC) received a grant from the Administration for Native Americans for its plan to combat the negative images of the Lakota that continue to harm the success of the businesses in the area. The way that the PRACC proposes to solve this issue is to educate tourism officials both on and off the reservation to foster relationships with the larger tourism destinations in the state, including Mt. Rushmore National Park, Crazy Horse Monument, and Badlands National Park, and to support businesses in creating and disseminating an authentic Lakota story.

Like many other tribes in the United States, the Lakota are interested in developing tourism on the reservation not only for its economic benefits but also for the cultural continuity of the tribe through education and the dispelling of myths and stereotypes.<sup>17,18</sup> John Hunt, Lawrence Royer, and Perry Brown argue that the need for a changing of perceptions of indigenous communities and tourism is also important for the Utah Navajo. In 1973, Hunt, Royer and Brown’s solution to this problem was for the Navajo to become more Western in their portrayal in order to cater to a wider tourist audience.<sup>9</sup> According to the PRACC, the Lakota have identified their image as a hindrance to tourism development on the Pine Ridge Reservation but their goals in changing this image rely on promoting their traditional cultural values to dispel myths rather than to acculturate to Anglo values and expectations of tourism.<sup>18</sup>

The Lakota have started on their endeavor to dispel myths and stereotypes by arming themselves with data from many different sources, including Colorado State University. This data includes information on the desires of the Lakota presented in Melanie Graham’s thesis and in studies conducted by The South Dakota Native Discovery project.<sup>17,18</sup> These sources document the desires of the Lakota in regards to tourism development on the reservation. The following table from Graham shows that the overall sentiment toward tourism is positive:

|   |                        | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|------------------------|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| Tourism brings economic growth to the reservation                 | Households (n=47)      | 0%                | 15%      | 11%     | 68%   | 6%             |
|   | Business Owners (n=37) | 0%                | 3%       | 0%      | 62%   | 35%            |
|   | Employees (n=15)       | 0%                | 0%       | 7%      | 73%   | 20%            |
| Tourism is good for Lakota culture                                | Households (n=48)      | 0%                | 15%      | 15%     | 65%   | 6%             |
|   | Business Owners (n=39) | 0%                | 5%       | 15%     | 64%   | 15%            |
|   | Business Owners (n=39) | 0%                | 13%      | 20%     | 67%   | 0%             |
| It is important to share Lakota culture and history with tourists | Households (n=48)      | 2%                | 8%       | 4%      | 73%   | 13%            |
|   | Business Owners (n=39) | 0%                | 3%       | 15%     | 67%   | 15%            |
|   | Employees (n=15)       | 7%                | 0%       | 0%      | 60%   | 33%            |

Also apparent in Graham’s study was the Lakota’s understanding of the potential detriments of tourism. The main concern that was voiced was the consequences of potential spiritual commodification and appropriation of Lakota religion and identity by tourism businesses and by tourists.<sup>17</sup> The Lakota also identified two actions to avoid the risk of spiritual commodification and appropriation: the creation of an entity with the purpose of monitoring and the use of traditional social sanctions in order to curb unacceptable behavior.<sup>17</sup>

Lacking in these surveys are the trends, desires, and suggestions from the tourists themselves. This information is important in un-

derstanding what stereotypes need to be addressed and what services can be catered to solving the problem. The first part of the PRACC’s three-year survey was conducted in the summer of 2010 by Colorado State University on the Pine Ridge Reservation in order to get a sense of who comes to the reservation and for what reasons. The survey revealed that the current travelers to the Pine Ridge Reservation fall into five main categories: faith-based interest (34.29%), leisure interest (25.71%), work (5.71%), residence (11.43%), and other (14.29%). This survey gives an idea of where the PRACC can focus its tourism marketing efforts. Because South Dakota receives a large amount of leisure tourists at Mt. Rushmore, the Black Hills, Crazy Horse, and the Badlands, there is a large pool of tourists that Pine Ridge can pull from.<sup>18</sup> When tourists were asked about future attractions they would like to see, they suggested horseback riding, water slides park, river rafting, more signs, more information about contemporary life on the reservation, more information about customs and stories, more food, retail, and vendors. A few respondents mentioned the need for tourism to stay Lakota owned and operated and the need for tourism to help improve the quality of life of the people.

The overall sentiment of the tourists in the 2009 survey was positive. Of the 71% of those who responded to the question, 92% were either ‘satisfied’ or ‘extremely satisfied’ with their visit to the reservation. The narrative of these respondents is also informative with quotes such as:

“Wonderfully spiritual and beautiful.”

“Lovely people, great scenery.”

“It is an interesting place to visit to learn about the Lakota people both present and past.”

“Lakota people and culture are wonderful and have so much to teach others. The economy on Pine Ridge is very difficult and people need help creating a positive local economy.”

Ninety-two percent also said they would recommend the reservation as a tourist destination to others. These trends of increasing satisfaction provide hope for the success of the PRACC making a difference in tourists’ opinions of Pine Ridge and in attracting more tourists to the area. It will be interesting to watch Pine Ridge over the next few years to see if their plan to incorporate an authentic Lakota story into the mainstream attractions of Mt. Rushmore, Crazy Horse, and the Badlands has a positive effect on their tourism rates and on their economy.

**Conclusion**

After careful consideration of the available literature on indigenous tourism, it can be argued that tourism—with sustainable planning, contributions from the entire community, and control in the hands of the indigenous community—can benefit the economy and culture of the community.

The one worry that is not addressed in the literature is the extent to which the literature is not necessarily representative of tribes. There are over 500 tribes in the United States which means there are many different opinions and experiences with the use of tourism as development, but the current literature is not representative of these views or experiences. Only one author, Alan Lew, takes a pan-Indian view of tourism by examining many tribes throughout the United States. Lew’s research determined whether or not tribes throughout the United States are involved, or intend to be involved, in tourism ventures rather than the impact that tourism has had on the communities or the experiences that tribes have had with tourism.<sup>21</sup> More comprehensive studies of tribes throughout the United States and their actual experiences with and opinions of tourism are needed in order

to provide models by which tribes can follow to successfully utilize tourism as a form of economic and community development.

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# English only in Valle Verde<sup>i</sup>

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This paper examines the unequal racial formations derived from English-only policies in a northern Colorado school district. For historical background, the formation and dissolution of bilingual education at the national, state, and local levels is presented. In the analysis, I first utilize Michael Omi and Howard Winant's multiple paradigm approach to examine the interrelated concepts of nation, ethnicity, and class in accordance with race formation. Second, I use Charles Mills' epistemological assertions to examine formal and informal relationships between signatories, beneficiaries, and the marginalized Other to expose racial undertones associated with English-only policies.<sup>ii</sup> And last, I pull from the works of Virginia Dominguez to examine the ways in which local, state, and federal governing bodies uphold racial disenfranchisement. When viewed through the lens of race formation theory, it is clear that educational policies at the national, state and local levels are often implemented to maintain a hierarchical social order.

**Methods**

I interviewed four Valle Verde community members, all of whom are represented by pseudonyms. I started with an informal interview in 2010 with an elementary education teacher who had taught in Valle Verde for over twenty years. She, identified as Kelli Andersen

in this study, provided me with over 600 pages of material including school board minutes, documents from her service among multiple committees, newspaper clippings, bilingual education articles, and several books. This material was loaned to me for a three-month period and was used to guide and direct my archival investigation of both national and local shifts in policy.

Several weeks later I set up another informal meeting with Kelli Andersen and three other people whom she identified as plausible interview participants. For over an hour we sat around a table and they shared experiential information on the history and demise of bilingual-bicultural education in Valle Verde. One Mexican American lady, identified as Margaret Sanchez, served as the Bilingual Unit Director for the Colorado Department of Education from 1977-1981 until the English Language Proficiency Act (ELPA) replaced the bilingual legislation. She later became the principal at Torrez Elementary, continuing the bilingual-bicultural program for fifteen years until 1998 when she retired. Similar to Mrs. Andersen, Ms. Sanchez also provided me with many archival documents.

Equally influential in providing information was a lady identified as Sandra Ramirez, a second generation Mexican American who was born in Valle Verde and has taught there for thirty-five years. She will