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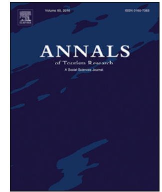

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Indigenous tourism and the sustainable development goals

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A B S T R A C T

This research aims to identify opportunities for the tourism industry to effectively address the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in ways that respect Indigenous priorities and support development aspirations of Indigenous peoples. We do so via case studies of Indigenous tourism among small-medium sized enterprises in Fiji, Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. The research finds that the Indigenous tourism enterprises operated in the spirit of many of the SDGs, even when they had low awareness of these goals. It also finds that Indigenous values and lifeways – such as appreciation of the intrinsic connection between nature and culture - correspond with the SDG agenda, and could be used to further advance this agenda in ways that benefit Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

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Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a framework of 17 goals and 169 targets to measure progress globally towards achieving long-term sustainable and inclusive development (United Nations, 2017; see Table 1). Ratified in September 2015 by 193 countries, the SDGs aim to balance economic, social and environmental sustainability and focus on inclusivity, shared prosperity and shared responsibility. Of significance, businesses are tasked with assuming a key role alongside governments and civil society in delivering on the targets (Scheyvens et al., 2016). The SDGs are seen as universal, applying equally to high-income and low-income countries. Regional and civil society groups had significant input into the goals which influenced the final configuration of the goals and targets; the Pacific Island countries notably negotiated a stand-alone goal on oceans – SDG 14 (Quirk & Hanich, 2016). While many see the strengths of these goals, others expose what can be seen as fundamental weaknesses, founded on failing to significantly challenge the current global economic system (Hickel, 2015). Of relevance to this study, in the finalisation of the goals, groups of people in different regions stressed the need to *contextualise* and *localise* goals (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2015). Extensive planning has since ensued around the implementation of the goals, with individual countries integrating the goals into national policies and development strategies, and occasionally, adapting the goals to suit their contexts (see, for example, Government of the Cook Islands, 2016).

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Table 1
United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Goal	Description
1. No poverty	End poverty in all its forms everywhere
2. Zero hunger	End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
3. Good health and well-being	Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
4. Quality education	Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
5. Gender equality	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
6. Clean water and sanitation	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
7. Affordable and clean energy	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
8. Decent work and economic growth	Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
9. Industry, innovation, and infrastructure	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
10. Reduce inequality within and among countries	Reduce inequality within and among countries
11. Sustainable cities and communities	Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
12. Responsible consumption and production	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
13. Climate action	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
14. Life below water	Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
15. Life on land	Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse
16. Peace, justice, and strong institutions	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive
17. Partnership for the goals	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

Source: United Nations (2017).

Concerns have been raised by Indigenous scholars, in particular, that the goals do not sufficiently consider Indigenous world views or priorities (Kawharu, 2015; Yap & Watene, 2019). Thus it has been asserted that "we must go beyond the global targets set by the UN to identify partnership goals that will foster our ability to achieve the SDGs for Indigenous peoples by 2030" (Odulaja & Halseth, 2018: 35). Building on this, Smith and Spencer (2020, in press) suggest that partnerships to achieve the SDGs will only be relevant to Indigenous peoples[1] if there is "…a collective acknowledgement of the past" as well as an understanding of what Indigenous people seek to achieve.

Research is thus needed to ascertain how implementation of the goals can respond to Indigenous people's priorities and aspirations. In our project we attempt to do this by examining tourism, an industry involving Indigenous peoples around the globe. As one of the world's largest industries and a major economic sector in many low-income countries, tourism is often promoted as a tool for development (Scheyvens, 2011). However, due to ongoing exploitation of Indigenous peoples, decades of cultural appropriation by the tourism industry, and lack of alignment with Indigneous values, Indigenous peoples have often been sceptical about fully engaging with the industry (Bunten, 2010; Carr et al., 2017). A number of extensive studies have been undertaken on the interface between Indigenous Peoples and tourism recently (Bunten & Graburn, 2018; Carr et al., 2017). Authors such as Pereiro (2016) are now arguing that tourism is no longer a threat for Indigenous peoples, due to responsible approaches to tourism which enable their sustainable development and empowerment. Furthermore, Indigenous peoples are increasingly active in advocating for their rights and wellbeing and advising at national and international policy or governance levels, for example, through WINTA (World Indigenous Tourism Alliance).

Our research examines the SDGs from the perspective of Indigenous people involved in tourism to understand whether the SDGs support Indigenous-led development aspirations. The research also considers in what ways Indigenous values and lifeways correspond, or not, to the SDG agenda. We do so via case studies of Indigenous tourism among small to medium-sized enterprises in Fiji, Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. The research ultimately aims to identify opportunities for tourism as an industry to effectively address the SDGs in ways that respect Indigenous priorities and enable meaningful outcomes for Indigenous enterprises and Indigenous communities in tourism destinations.

[1] The definition of the term "Indigenous Peoples" is contested. According to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (UN, 2008) Indigenous Peoples are known by a set of common characteristics and their key rights include the right to self-identification and self-determination. The UN has elaborated, noting that they are "inheritors and practitioners of unique cultures and ways of relating to people and the environment. They have retained social, cultural, economic and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs – Indigenous People, 2021).

Literature review

The Sustainable Development Goals and tourism

Tourism is unequivocally positioned as a tool to advance the achievement of the SDGs (UNWTO, 2017). Three goals (SDG 8, 12 and 14) explicitly refer to the need to engage the tourism industry, addressing economic growth and employment, sustainable consumption and production, and protecting marine resources respectively. However, all of the goals have some relevance to tourism because of their capacity to address poverty, inequalities and gender disparities (see Boluk et al., 2019). A compendium produced by NGOs and responsible tourism organisations which links each SDG to tourism provides insights into the possibilities for a more sustainable tourism sector (Transforming Tourism, 2017). Yet, Hall (2019) remains unconvinced that SDGs provide a useful guiding framework for tourism development. He is highly critical of the "managerial ecological" approach adopted by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and others which appears to give a nod to sustainability while continuing along the path of a strongly neoliberal agenda which has led to increasing resource degradation and social disruption through tourism in recent years (Hall, 2019, p.1044). Hall, thus, asserts that we need to fundamentally rethink human-environment relations and be open to alternative development trajectories if tourism is to have any hope of being sustainable.

In searching for pathways to sustainable transitions in tourism, Boluk et al. (2019, p. 849) point to the importance of engaging with diverse and under-represented world views, with attention to feminist and Indigenous perspectives presenting alternatives to the neoliberal economic growth model within which the SDGs are embedded. Such perspectives highlight issues of power, justice and oppression, consideration of Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies, and they elevate the significance of relationships and responsibilities to people and environment (Boluk et al., 2019). This opens up a more critical interrogation of the SDG agenda within tourism studies.

There has been insufficient focus to date on how the SDGs can best respond to local priorities and agendas in a tourism context or how different perspectives and voices are represented in the realisation of the goals. Development initiatives have a greater chance of success where they are aligned to local priorities whilst development initiated from outside faces challenges around sustainability and can undermine local development (Gegeo, 1998). In an Indigenous context, authors have consistently emphasised the gap in understanding between international intentions and local practice, which leads to the marginalisation of Indigenous development strategies (Hau'ofa, 1994; Meo-Sewabu & Walsh-Tapiata, 2012). In the Pacific Islands, it is noted that despite the importance of the tourism industry to the region its development impacts are 'muted' (Cheer et al., 2018). Similarly in Aotearoa New Zealand (Amoamo et al., 2018) and in Australia (Akbar & Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018), concerns have long been raised that while the tourism industry draws heavily on cultural representations of Māori and Aboriginal people, respectively, it has often failed to deliver meaningful, holistic development benefits to Indigenous people living in tourism destination areas. It is important, then, to examine whether tourism initiatives in these regions respond to the challenge of addressing the goals while being cognisant of Indigenous perspectives and values.

SDGs: culture, spirituality, and Indigenous peoples

The United Nations involved Indigenous peoples worldwide in the development of the SDGs through the formation of The Indigenous People's Major Group (DeLuca, 2017). This group assisted through proposals and positioning papers to aid the consultation process surrounding the SDGs (United Nations, n.d.-b). While culture has been viewed as being the 'heart' of the SDG's central pillars (Hosagrahar, 2017), some argue there should be a separate cultural pillar alongside the economic, social and environmental dimensions (Cisneros, 2017; Watene & Yap, 2015). There are only six references made to Indigenous knowledge/peoples in the SDGs, and culture is mentioned a mere five times (Yap & Watene, 2019). Thus concerns remain that Indigenous development, knowledge and perspectives require greater attention in the SDG agenda (Thampoe, 2018; Yap & Watene, 2019).

Priorities for Indigenous groups have focussed primarily on welfare and wellbeing issues related to education, health and land rights, with tourism considered just one of several means to advance economic development in order to achieve the SDGs. The governance settings of nation-states thus affect Indigenous people's relationships with the SDGs, for example, in terms of addressing injustices around loss of lands as consequence of colonialism. Yap and Watene (2019) note though that SDG indicators either lack relevance for Indigenous peoples or "…take place within the broader power structures that have historically undermined their development aspirations and their ongoing struggles for self-determination" (p.454).

Spiritual values are central to the way that many Indigenous cultures understand the world and their relationship to it, and thus how they wish to manage their development. In Australia, Aboriginal nations have diverse spiritual values but express common understandings of the relationships between people, Country, all other entities and the rules of sustainable living; this is generically described as "the Dreaming" in English. Kwaymullina explains (2005, 12):

> For Aboriginal peoples, country is much more than a place. Rock, tree, river, hill, animal, human-all were formed of the same substance by the Ancestors who continue to live in land, water, sky. Country is filled with relations speaking language and following Law, no matter whether the shape of that relation is human, rock, crow, wattle. Country is loved, needed, and cared for, and country loves, needs, and cares for her peoples in turn. Country is family, culture, identity. Country is self.

Similarly, traditional Māori world views consider land, water, landscape features and various natural resources as living elements that possess *wairua* (spirit) or *mauri* (life force) (Henare, 2001). For Māori their *mana* or spiritual power and authority

is reflected in associations with their *tūrangawaewae* (ancestral lands) and associated resources (Walker, 1990). Since the 1990s, Treaty of Waitangi settlements have enacted legislation that has enabled Māori to reconnect to traditional practices, recognising their Indigenous values in a statutory manner. For example, the *Te Urewera Act 2014* resulted in the Urewera National Park being returned to Tūhoe who the Crown acknowledge as rightful *kaitiaki* (guardians) (Ruru, 2014).

Whilst discussion around Indigenous involvement with the SDGs is not widespread in the countries this research focuses on, in many respects the SDGs are seeking to achieve outcomes informed by values that are central to the cultures of many Indigenous peoples. In the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori cultural values such as *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship), not the SDGs, have informed uniquely Indigenous approaches that have outcomes related to the SDGs, particularly within environmental contexts (McIntosh et al., 2004). Similarly in Fiji, whilst national development plans reference the SDGs widely, in communities it is traditional values and knowledge that are central to enabling sustainable use of natural resources. This can be seen, for example, when chiefs in Fiji protect areas of the coastal waters by making them *waitui tabu*, or prohibited fishing zones. And in Australia, as Yap and Watene (2019) demonstrate, Aboriginal communities such as the Yawuru of Broome, Western Australia have cosmologies that connect people to culture and Country that serve as culturally-underpinned approaches to well-being that have sustained such communities for millennia.

The indigenous interface with entrepreneurship and tourism: definitions matter

In order to understand how Indigenous tourism can contribute to Indigenous wellbeing, we will now examine some of the principles and values underpinning Indigenous entrepreneurship. This will enable understanding of various forms of Indigenous peoples' engagement with tourism, either through Indigenous ownership or through involvement in tourism enterprises.

Indigenous entrepreneurship considers how entrepreneurship can support Indigenous self-determination and sustainable development (Dana, 2015; Mika et al., 2018). Indigenous entrepreneurship is not new; it has existed as long as Indigenous peoples have existed, helping to sustain traditional economies and ecologies over many centuries (Trosper, 2009). It can be understood as central to a balanced approach to development which addresses not just economic wellbeing, but helps to maintain political and social stability (Hailey, 1992). Colonisation has typically undermined the land base, languages, cultures, traditions and institutions of Indigenous peoples leading to a loss of some traditional knowledge and the capacity and propensity to utilise it. Thus, access to resources, which underpin entrepreneurial activity—human capital, social capital, financial capital, cultural capital, and natural capital—may be decidedly limited (Furneaux & Brown, 2008). The amalgam of indigeneity and entrepreneurship to form Indigenous entrepreneurship then, is not simply about the economics of legitimising the role of the entrepreneur and entrepreneurial activity within Indigenous communities, but is also about the politics of Indigenous self-determination because without it, Indigenous economic development is less likely to succeed (Cahn, 2008; Cornell & Jorgensen, 2007).

Tourism is one industry in which indigeneity and entrepreneurship can, arguably, mesh to realise the development aspirations of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous knowledge, culture, identity, language and lifeways constitute valuable resources that Indigenous peoples can and do use to construct and offer tourism products, services and experiences to differentiate themselves and their destinations from others (Peredo & McLean, 2013). Indigenous people's engagement with tourism also demonstrates the significance of the interconnectivity of nature, society and culture in tourism development (Movono, 2017). Indigenous tourism is, therefore, not necessarily just an entrepreneurial activity intended for Indigenous economic wellbeing: it is often a multifaceted enterprise for the self-determined and sustainable development of Indigenous peoples, reflected in their intentions and efforts to preserve their culture and way of life and to share this with others on their terms. Yet, Indigenous peoples may be limited in the scope of their tourism activity to small-scale enterprises to supplement household incomes because of restricted access to entrepreneurial resources, markets or governmental and civic support (Carr et al., 2017; Sofield, 1993). They sometimes find that utilising their cultural heritage to earn tourist income can lead to desecration of sacred sites (Johnston, 2013), or divides a community and contributes to inequality (Tabani, 2010). Nash's (1977) seminal work took an even more critical note, warning that some forms of tourism involving Indigenous peoples could be equated with imperialism. Taking a more positive stance, Mika (2018) highlights the importance of focussing on Indigenous conceptualisations of value in tourism to understand how Indigenous tourism can be supported and nurtured in ways that contribute to Indigenous wellbeing.

How, then, to define Indigenous tourism? Current definitions and models of Indigenous tourism circulating in academia shed light on tensions and power discrepancies that need greater attention. The prevailing definition is that offered by Butler and Hinch, who characterise Indigenous tourism as "tourism activity in which indigenous people are directly involved either through control and/or by having their culture serve as the essence of the attraction" (2007, pp.5–6). This distinguishes three categories: Indigenous controlled forms of tourism based around their culture; diversified Indigenous tourism which refers to Indigenous controlled businesses that do not trade on their culture; and culture-dispossessed tourism which describes cases when non-Indigenous businesses trade on Indigenous culture without appropriate regard to Indigenous peoples. This latter inclusion makes this definition of Indigenous tourism problematic.

Advancing ideas in this regard, Bunten and Graburn (cited in Bunten, 2010, p.285) define Indigenous tourism as "any service or product that is (a) owned and operated at least in part by an Indigenous group and (b) results from a means of exchange with outside guests." Peters and Higgins-Desbiolles (2012) offer an alternative perspective considering Indigenous peoples themselves as "tourists"; this illuminates the powerful cultural and social ties, and spiritual development that can come from Indigenous travel, hospitality and cultural education. This work also indicated tourism can be understood entirely differently when analysed from an Indigenous world view. Bunten (2010) later proposed the concept of "Indigenous capitalism" through tourism, which she describes as "[…] a distinct strategy to achieve ethical, culturally appropriate, and successful Indigenous participation within the

global economy" (2010, p.285). This insight reinforces Indigenous people's interest in business but engages with this from a foundation of Indigenous values.

Whyte (2010) cautions us to be critically reflective through his examination of Indigenous tourism using an environmental justice framework. This work draws attention to the ways in which Indigenous communities can be coerced into tourism (including in environmental tourism, volunteer tourism and pro-poor tourism forms) as a result of vulnerabilities such as a lack of economic opportunities and disadvantage. Whyte asks: "what environmental justice framework should we use to evaluate these practices?" (2010, p.75). Building on Figueroa's (2010, p.75) work, he urges a move away from "mutually advantageous exploitation" and towards "environmental coalition development".

These important analyses on the Indigenous interface with tourism demonstrate that power, agency, values, cultures and coalitions matter. These insights have shaped our approach to the diverse case studies introduced in the methodology section, that represent different approaches to Indigenous tourism. These range from Indigenous-owned, single operator businesses, to Indigenous community-owned or controlled businesses and activities, to non-Indigenous businesses that have worked with Indigenous communities in ways that support community aspirations.

Conceptualising Indigenous tourism enterprises and the SDGs

The literature makes several things clear. While there is much rhetoric about how tourism can contribute to achieving SDGs, there is insufficient attention to local priorities, and the need for more sustainable trajectories for tourism based on a transformation of human-environment relations. We also note that the SDG agenda has been criticised for failing to adequately incorporate culture in general, and the concerns and values of Indigenous peoples in particular (see Yap & Watene, 2019). Indigenous peoples have been central to tourism endeavours globally, but this does not mean that they *control* such endeavours, that their values *inform* such endeavours, or that they *benefit* holistically from these endeavours. On a positive note, much has been learned in recent years about effective Indigenous approaches to entrepreneurship and this knowledge, coupled with increases in the incorporation of Indigenous values in resource management around the world, offers considerable promise. Ideally these insights could guide how the SDGs more fully achieve Indigenous aspirations.

Methodology

Collaborating across an Indigenous and non-Indigenous team

The research builds on an emerging collaboration of tourism scholars in Aoteraoa New Zealand, the Pacific and Australia interested in understanding linkages between Indigenous peoples, tourism and the SDGs. The team of six, which includes three Indigenous and three non-Indigenous scholars, was formed based on the understanding that research on topics of interest to Indigenous people should be conducted by, or in partnership with, Indigenous researchers. The non-Indigenous researchers in the team sought to be 'academic accomplices' (Mataira, 2019, p.146), leveraging resources, strategising and working closely alongside the three Indigenous scholars in a constructive, collaborative manner (Chilisa, 2012). Collaboration through *kanohi-ki-te-kanohi* (face-to-face) meetings was important to the team. Two workshops, held in January and October 2019, facilitated input of all members into research design and analysis of findings. Our two Māori researchers were responsible for leading the Aotearoa New Zealand case studies, whilst an Indigenous Fijian researcher led the Fijian case studies and an Aboriginal tourism leader coled the Australian case. Each researcher partnered with a non-Indigenous researcher to collect data except for the case study of Te Ana Ngāi Tahu Rock Art Centre which one Indigenous researcher did alone. The team members' existing research and expertise on tourism and Indigenous peoples informed this research.

Indigenous methodologies and conducting research with Indigenous participants

This research is founded on the notion that we need more local, especially Indigenous, input into setting development goals. Thus we aim for the research to be able to show how tourism in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia and Fiji is being, or could be, progressed in ways which align with the SDGs while also generating meaningful development outcomes for Indigenous peoples. Cognisant of an Indigenous view of research as "embedded in our history as natives under the gaze of western science and colonialism" (Smith, 2005, p.87), we approached the research in a way which allows for the decolonisation of research methods. This involves "taking apart the story, revealing underlying texts, and giving voice to things that are often known intuitively" (Smith, 1999, p.3).

In-depth conversations—rather than formal interviews—were used in our research. Thus for the Whanganui case studies, *kōrero*—which here refers to conversations, discussions and stories that seek to establish relations through *whakapapa* (geneaology) and *pūrakau* (tribal narratives)—took place (Forster et al., 2016). Similarly, in Fiji the interactions between researchers and case studies participants were enabled through *talanoa,* which refers to the process whereby two or more people converse, share ideas and stories (Movono et al., 2018). Further, *talanoa* infers the practices of listening, allowing silences, and exercising patience and humility in guiding discussions all of which allow the researcher to "see, not just look; to hear, not just listen" (Vaioleti, 2006, p.30). Similarly, Aboriginal Australia holds practices of shared dialogue and deep listening; this was described as *dadirri* in the work of Aboriginal scholar Judy Atkinson (2002, p.15): dadirri is "…an Indigenous philosophy

informing investigative processes and ethical cultural behaviour (in research)…". These examples point to the ways Indigenist research features Indigenous values and practices that shape the research process.

Multiple case study methodology

Case studies were selected generally based on pre-existing relationships between the researchers and key people in the selected enterprises and communities. As noted earlier, we went beyond Bunten and Graburn's (2009) definition in our choice of case studies, which include both Indigenous-owned and/or operated businesses and ventures that work in close association with local Indigenous communities. Based in three different geographical regions, data was collected between March and October 2019 through a qualitative, interview-based approach.

In Aotearoa New Zealand: first, we included Te Ana Ngāi Tahu Rock Art Centre in Timaru, the only organisation in New Zealand dedicated to the protection and management of rock art sites; and second, several Māori owned and operated tourism ventures along the Whanganui River including Whanganui River Adventures, Te Ao Hou Marae and Unique Whanganui River Experience. In Australia, our case study was Aboriginal Cultural Tours South Australia (ACTSA), taking tours to Adjahdura and Ngadjuri lands. Quentin Agius is the sole owner and tour operator of ACTSA and has been running coastal and outbush tours in South Australia since 2007. We selected two case studies in Fiji: Rivers Fiji is a US-owned and locally-managed rafting and kayaking business which has been running trips in the Upper Nauva River in the Fiji highlands since 1997, and works closely with Indigenous communities. Talanoa Treks is a UK-owned and community-operated tourism trekking venture, established in 2013 as a social enterprise taking tourists on treks into the Fiji highlands.

In all cases, either the owner or manager of the enterprise was the key informant. These were people who all had an intimate knowledge of the history and evolution of the business along with principles driving the enterprise, and the challenges as well as successes they had experienced. In some cases, a few other people were interviewed as well, such as river guides in Fiji. During *talanoa, korero, dadirri* and interviews with these people, they were asked to share how, and why, their enterprises emerged and to share what they considered distinctive about their business and the way they ran them, compared with other types of tourism enterprises in the area. This question sometimes elicited comments on the ways in which Indigenous values informed their business practice. If business owners or operators were familiar with the SDGs, we then asked whether their business was inspired or influenced by the SDGs and if so, in what ways. With the exception of the Fijian case studies, our case study owners and operators knew little about the SDGs, so in these situations we asked whether they took specific steps in their enterprise to be sustainable. Finally, we asked all participants about the ways their enterprise had helped them to achieve personal, family, cultural, or spiritual aspirations.

Interviews were either recorded and transcribed or detailed notes were taken and written up soon after. Case studies were written and shared with the project team in preparation for detailed discussion and analysis at the second workshop.

Ethics processes and local research procedures

As three of the researchers in the team were based at Xxx University, which also part-funded the research, ethics approval for the project was sought here. The Xxx University human ethics code is characterised by a 'deep consideration, high trust' approach which is based on the expectation that researchers will thoughtfully apply universal and Treaty of Waitangi obligations and principles throughout the research process. Researchers adopting this *kaupapa* (philosophy) apply these principles to ensure participants have autonomy, that they benefit in a just way from the research, authentic relationships are developed, and there is meaningful consultation and reciprocity (Massey University, 2017).

In all case studies, information sheets were provided to participants in advance and they were discussed in full during face-to-face meetings. In Fiji, local research procedures involved seeking permission and consent through meeting with company representatives and performing a *sevusevu* (customary presentation of *yaqona*/kava roots accompanying a request). Access was negotiated with the tour sites and arrangements made to visit these sites. Interviews with company owners and managers were undertaken in English, while *talanoa* with guides and the village committee were held in both English and Fijian. Direct contact was made with the participants in all of the Māori case studies, based on existing relationships and interviews were undertaken in English with some use of *te reo* (Māori language). In Australia, the research was undertaken as research partnership between a non-Indigenous academic and an award winning Aboriginal tourism operator based on a long-standing relationship of collaboration in teaching, research and policy interventions.

Relationships and reciprocity

A key principle underpinning Indigenous research across Oceania is reciprocity which is "the essence of communal and collective values and is the glue that builds and binds the social capital of communities" (Stewart-Withers et al., 2014, p.74). Pacific research principles emphasise the importance of research that benefits the researched community, focusses on Indigenous people's needs and takes into account Indigenous cultural values and protocols (Nabobo-Baba, 2004). Māori ethical research principles similarly encompass a focus on the quality of relationships (*whanaungatanga*), the research design and what is right for a particular situation (*tika*), cultural and social responsibility and respect for persons (*manaakitanga*), and justice and equity (*mana*) (Hudson et al., 2010). Ideally, such research should be able to contribute to Indigenous struggles for social justice (Smith, 2012). Building accountability into all stages of the research process ensures that benefits accrue to research participants in different ways, in forms that are most appropriate, effective and meaningful for them (Teaiwa, 2004, p.226).

Respecting the importance of the values outlined above, the research process involved maintaining and building ongoing connections between researchers and participants. This involved returning the research findings to communities in ways aligned with their priorities. This ranged from providing people with transcripts of their interviews, through to visiting to report orally on how the research was progressing, and presenting at workshops where the researchers were invited to share their findings and ideas with case study participants and other Indigenous entrepreneurs. Some of the case studies discussed here are based on long-term relationships between the researchers and the participants, particularly Te Ana Ngāi Tahu Rock Art Centre and Aboriginal Cultural Tours. For example, previous research has documented Ngāi Tahu's conservation, preservation and management of the rock art sites (Thompson-Carr, 2013). Others have explored ways to build new connections, for example links strengthened between Rivers Fiji and the University of the South Pacific have resulted in guest lectures given by the operational manager, and further links have been established with Talanoa Treks to explore exchange opportunities for guides. In the case of ventures along the Whanganui River, the researchers organised for a student intern to support the work of a Māori tourism organisation working with Māori entrepreneurs. For the Australian case, the research team has had a long standing, collaborative relationship and the non-Indigenous researcher has supported the enterprise through ongoing advice, support and advocacy. The researchers are committed to maintaining a relationship with case study organisations beyond the scope of the research, returning to the communities to share findings, and making ourselves available to contribute to their development aspirations around Indigenous tourism and sustainable development.

Findings

In most of the case studies, high interest in the SDGs was coupled with low awareness about the SDGs and how they might apply to their work. In this section, we discuss the sustainability beliefs, values and practices of Indigenous tourism operators in our study. Concurrently, we reflect on how the SDGs can learn from Indigenous approaches to tourism.

Indigenous understandings of culture and spirituality support sustainable practices

Commitment to cultural integrity along with spiritual beliefs were strong elements of all of the Indigenous-owned case studies. The foundation of Māori tourism development along the Whanganui River is a powerful sense of place and connection to *tīpuna* (ancestors), and the belief in the river as a living and healing being which deserves respect. *Te Awa Tupua (Whanganui River Settlement) Act 2017* extended the rights of a human entity to the Whanganui River, giving it legal personhood. This is apparent in the well-known *whakataukī* (proverb), *Ko au te Awa, ko te Awa ko au* (I am the River, and the River is me). There has been a growth in international and tourist interest in the river since then. One research participant who lives on a *marae* (complex of carved buildings and grounds that belong to particular *hapū*) alongside the river recalled that soon after the river was given legal personhood, a local councilor asked him, “How do we capitalise on this?” By this, he meant, how can we use this to promote economic growth? The participant was not interested in growing the numbers of people on the river, however, but on offering meaningful experiences to local people and tourists who come to his *marae* to *wānanga* (learn) about Māori culture and the river. He felt that what people learned on the marae opened up channels for healing, and this was sometimes seen when people returned to debrief after a river journey:

> They did come back here [after their canoe trip]..some of them were breaking down crying; there was real transformation that occurred. Really I think part of that is allowing nature—or a connection back to nature—to see yourself through a different lens (Geoff Hipango, Te Ao Hou Marae).

Similar to the notion that a river can be seen as a person, Quenten Agius of Aboriginal Cultural Tours of South Australia, explained how:

> We talk about Country in the same way that we talk about a person: we speak to Country, sing to Country, visit Country, worry about Country, feel sorry for Country, long for Country, and we want to protect our Country and what's left of our ancient sites and burial grounds, which link us to our ancestors and culture, and identify who we are as Aboriginal people.

This belief that natural features have both a physical nature and a spirit is why traditionally, Indigenous peoples globally have treated the natural environment with great respect and can be seen at the heart of the operations of the case studies discussed here. The owners and managers view the business as part of a shared social and ecological system (Movono, 2017), with responsibility for common custodianship of natural, cultural and spiritual resources. This commitment underpins business practices to protect significant cultural heritage. It has already been noted that the SDGs accord little attention to Indigenous peoples and culture; there is even less focus on spirituality or intangible cultural heritage. Bringing in these elements would provide a stronger agenda for sustainable development going forward.

SDGs talk about management – Indigenous enterprises talk about guardianship

While the SDGs designate good management strategies as an essential approach to secure sustainability (Hall, 2019), the Indigenous case study enterprises emphasised Indigenous values as foundational for sustainability, particularly cultural articulations of guardianship. For instance, Goal 8 of the SDGs on decent work and economic growth discusses achieving “sustainable economic

growth" by "fostering quality jobs that stimulate the economy while not harming the environment" (United Nations, n.d.-a, p.1); essentially arguing sound management can find the right balance between economy, society and the environment. Guardianship is much more than this notion of managing to balance competing and conflicting goals. Indigenous peoples are in part identified by the value of guardianship (see article 25 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples or UNDRIP) (United Nations, 2008), and their responsibilities to act as guardians informed and shaped the engagement with tourism for the operators and organisations we worked with.

Each business was guided by specific Indigenous philosophies which reinforced their roles as corporates who should act as custodians of culture, ecology and the spirit of place and people. *Kaitiakitanga* is the Māori ethic of guardianship, which has a deep cultural and intellectual history in Māori society and economy, which influences institutional and environmental policy, practice and systems (Kawharu, 2000; Spiller et al., 2011). In the case of the Te Ana Ngāi Tahu Rock Art Centre, the Ngāi Tahu Runanga emphasised that *kaitiakitanga* was a leading value from the early days of planning the centre (Blundell, 2010). The centre manager Rachel Solomon observed that "with respect to *kaitiakitanga* key outcomes for the iwi are education, protection and cultural revitalisation…" Based on *kaitiakitanga*, efforts were made to restore the landscape and waterways through tree-planting in rock art ecosystems, such as the Opihi rock art site, and tourism; plus school visits complemented the values-based management in terms of encouraging awareness and respect for the rock art. This approach honours the *mana* (spiritual power) of the rock art "with all our guides passing on knowledge that has been handed down…it is our history that we are talking about" (Rachel Solomon, Te Ana Ngāi Tahu Rock Art Centre).

Providing another tangible example of *kaitiakitanga*, Hayden Potaka, owner of Unique Whanganui River Experiences, said that his strong belief was that there should be a Māori cultural navigator on every river journey, in order to ensure that cultural protocols and sustainable practices were followed, and that the spirituality of the river was respected. The concept of guardianship, custodianship or stewardship reflects principles of long-term conservation and protection of the environment. As the managing director of Rivers Fiji, Kasi Taukeinikoro, explains, their business philosophy is "to be genuine in our commitment to being custodians of the area, and respecting its resources, people, and future generations".

All of the businesses are values-based in their motivations

All businesses in our study are motivated by specific cultural and social values, not simply profit-making. They want to do right by the people and by the culture, aiming for types of development or growth that align with their values. Criteria for success often exceed basic economic motivations and are embedded within contextually recognized cultural and social values. Thus respect for the environment, local culture and 'doing good for everyone's sake' is a common thread that links these businesses.

In Fiji, both businesses attest to the fact that they are in business because they want to do right by the land and the people. Kasi Taukeinikoro, the Managing Director of Rivers Fiji, emphasised that they have an "obligation" to assist the surrounding community, not because of any formal agreement, but because it "is the right thing to do." Rivers Fiji provides communities with transport to health centres, water filters, waste removal services and educational programmes for local schools and youth clubs, but more significantly, the communities have a say in how the business operates and are invested in its success. They retain access to and ownership of the land and water and its resources for fishing and agriculture as well as benefitting from lease money, employment opportunities and sustainable environmental practices.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the enterprises are also guided by cultural values. With respect to her family's venture, which typically involved jetboating up the river then walking to an historic site (the 'Bridge to Nowhere'), Josephine Haworth of Whanganui River Adventures noted that they tried to minimise their environmental footprint: "We do one tour per day, so there's less impact; with four boats, so that's sixty people max. We won't do extra trips even if there's more demand…" Josephine also reflected that when attending Māori business forums, "our discussions are about quality, not quantity, and about culture. At general tourism forums it's all about the numbers coming through." Another aspect to the values-base of these businesses was not wanting growth for the sake of growth, as articulated by the *marae*-based cultural learning tourism operator:

> We're not…trying to get bigger to have double the number of people coming in. It's more about, well, look at our location – how can we enhance the experience? Some people say, 'Geoff, you should look at maybe setting up other things'… [but] I'm not so much interested in the bus rolling up to the marae and 45 coming out with cameras, you know that sort… It's just sort of like not the right fit. But I am interested in the relationships that we've established… (Geoff Hipango, Te Ao Hou Marae).

Quentin Agius of Aboriginal Cultural Tours of South Australia, provides tours to educate school groups and students. On one occasion he took a group of Adelaide Law Students to a burial site at Black Point on the Yorke Peninsula. They saw a work crew digging for an ablution block within 1 km of this significant site, and were rightly concerned. Thus, Quentin's tours sometimes raise awareness of desecration of Aboriginal lands, and he tries to push the point that, "We all have a responsibility to Country, to the plants, to the animals, and to the human—the blackfella who walks that Country" (Quentin Agius, Aboriginal Cultural Tours of South Australia).

Similarly, at the Te Ana Ngāi Tahu Rock Art Centre, they encourage educational programmes. This has enabled a sustained long-term focus that exemplifies the spirit of the sustainable knowledge platform of SDG4, despite the management not being aware of or specifically adopting the SDGs within their operations or planning. While Te Ana are part of the Ngāi Tahu *iwi* that has a successful portfolio of mainstream tourism enterprises, focusing on school groups meant that "we didn't fit in the Ngāi Tahu Tourism corporate markets" (Rachel Solomon, Te Ana Ngāi Tahu Rock Art Centre). Instead, they work with the Takiwā

Tourism, a collective of smaller enterprises, allowing them to remain true to their values: "Our vision is of a collective of thriving indigenous businesses which benefit local communities, improve outcomes for whānau (families) and honour and respect our environment" (Takiwa Tourism, 2020).

These examples all underscore the need emphasised by Yap and Watene for Indigenous values and culture to be understood as the underlying foundation of sustainable development (2019, p.456). By making such priorities and practices visible we also extend our understanding of sustainable development and how this knowledge can contribute to achieving the SDGs.

Equitable sharing and communal benefits are important for Indigenous operators

Furthermore, the findings reveal that the case study businesses are quite unorthodox in that they are quite committed to equitable sharing and ensuring communal benefits. Rivers Fiji and Talanoa Treks, for example, act as incubators to empower locals, providing employment and training, and becoming a tool with which locals can fulfill specific traditional obligations such as raising money for the church or for a specific village-based project. The owners of Talanoa Treks, Matt Capper and Marita Manley, stated that,

> The business and local participation in it, is not for people to enrich themselves, but to enhance the lives and standard of the entire community…and in doing so, locals always try to convince us to include other villages with which they have specific relations.

These comments speak to the interconnectivity between the business and multiple communities, and the importance of sharing the benefits of tourism. Similarly, money earned from trekking tourism has been used to establish a village fund and build a communal kitchen so that the entire community benefits, instead of enriching a few. In the case of Rivers Fiji, this long-standing business chooses to share the benefits widely among the landowning communities, "…when it could be easier and more profitable to have exclusive dealings with one community, or better not to pay leases at all because the company is not obliged by law" (Kasi Taukeinikoro, Rivers Fiji). Such an approach enabled more genuine and fruitful relationships with local communities.

The Māori tourism case studies share similar characteristics of thinking about communal benefits, with one operator noting that she was not only concerned about her business continuing to thrive, rather, "We've got to look at the future of our little community. But also others along the river road… Our future goal is to try to bring more employment to the river region" (Josephine Haworth, Whanganui River Adventures). Similarly, when asked about his motivation for starting a tourism enterprise in recent years, another respondent reflected: "I'm certainly not going to be all out blinking rich from it, because that's not why I do it, but it [is]… around having our people employed in those roles as guides or cultural navigators…" (Hayden Potaka, Unique Whanganui River Experience).

Conclusion

This research sought to examine the SDGs from the perspectives of Indigenous peoples involved in tourism to understand whether the SDGs support Indigenous-led development aspirations. What it reveals is that many Indigenous tourism operations have low, even non-existent, awareness of the SDGs yet in their culturally-centred operations were operating in the spirit of many of the SDGs. Those operators who were aware of the aims of the SDGs (Rivers Fiji and Talanoa Treks) confirmed that their business practices largely align with SDG priorities, supporting sustainable social, environmental and economic outcomes. However, the research also reveals that Indigenous values and knowledge are central to sustainable business operations, which are not accounted for in the SDGs. The findings indicate that Indigenous tourism can inform the SDGs because certain Indigenous values and lifeways correspond with the values behind the SDGs, and can be used to further advance this agenda in a way that benefits Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

Despite differences in our case studies, some commonalities are reflected in how Indigenous world views, knowledge and values are incorporated in the rationale for the enterprises, how they serve visitors and communities and the centrality of relationships to the business ethos. These differences are reflected in tourism products and services, but they also require acceptance of a different framing of economy and enterprise. In particular, a non-mainstream view of the relationship between tourism and the natural environment and community is evident through practising guardianship rather than management of natural heritage, culture and people. The findings also reveal that all case studies are inspired by the needs and aspirations of communities and act accordingly as a vehicle for development. For example, they seek to provide jobs in communities where there are few economic options (Whanganui River Adventures, Rivers Fiji and Talanoa Treks) and they train young people and provide leadership opportunities (Rivers Fiji and Unique Whanganui Adventures). Enlisting community support and sharing benefits with communities are clear priorities for several of the enterprises (Whanganui river Adventures, Rivers Fiji, Talanoa Treks, Te Ana Ngāi Tahu Rock Art Centre). Ongoing relationships with tourism partnerships that value cultural knowledge and protocol are visible, for example Te Ana Ngāi Tahu Rock Art Centre's collaborative marketing alongside other Takiwā Tourism ventures and Talanoa Treks' partnership with the Fiji Museum to digitally preserve cultural traditions. These elements of Indigenous tourism imply an inclusive, holistic and long-term approach to sustainable development by the enterprises.

The findings have implications for the development outcomes for Indigenous communities involved in tourism enterprises, encompassing economic, environmental, spiritual, cultural and social benefits. The examples discussed here suggest that Indigenous tourism is not just an entrepreneurial activity intended for Indigenous economic wellbeing; it is often a multifaceted

enterprise for the self-determined and sustainable development of Indigenous peoples. This is reflected in these endeavours to share their culture and way of life with others, but on their own terms.

The SDGs will become more meaningful for Indigenous peoples if there is room for acknowledgement of past experiences and wrongs. While some of the enterprises in this study included a strong educational focus that aligns with SDG 4 on quality education and lifelong learning, including Te Ana Ngāi Tahu Rock Art Centre and Rivers Fiji, which both target school children in some activities, perhaps even more important is alignment with SDG 16—'Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions.' Te Ao Hou Marae, which provides space for tourists to stop, reflect and *wananga*/learn and runs programmes for new migrants, and Aboriginal Cultural Tours of South Australia, which exposes those on its tours of 'Country' to the values of the Aboriginal people of that area and the importance of upholding their rights, allow for Indigenous knowledge, experiences and histories to be shared in authentic ways. Both Rivers Fiji and Talanoa Treks operate on a strict 'leave no trace' philosophy, educating both tourists and communities on the environmental impact of human activity in the area, and Talanoa Treks also contributes to the digital preservation of cultural heritage by communities.

Of considerable promise is the fact that there is now greater knowledge globally of the effectiveness of Indigenous approaches to entrepreneurship, along with appreciation for how Indigenous values can be incorporated into resource management. Terms like *kaitiakitanga* show that cultural values are inseparable from natural values in the cases in this research, with cultural practices often informing the way communities manage their enterprises particularly in natural environments. In addition, spirituality is an important dimension of sustainability for some Indigenous tourism operators, and is unrepresented in the SDGs. Spirituality is not limited to human consciousness and religion, but to Indigenous belief systems about the natural and physical worlds, and how they see their role in relation to the environment, society and economy. Ideally, an appreciation of the intrinsic connection between nature and culture, and how spirituality influences Indigenous thought and behaviour, offers guidance on how the SDGs can contribute more meaningfully to achieving Indigenous aspirations.

As Pereiro (2016) noted, Indigenous tourism no longer presents the threat to Indigenous communities and cultures that it once did, in part because of significant activism and empowerment of Indigenous people. The key question now is how best to harness Indigenous tourism opportunities to further Indigenous goals and futures, such as supporting self-determination. In terms of our study, Indigenous tourism represents a small proportion of the tourism activity in the regions and countries in which the businesses are located and operate, which limits their potential as contributors to sustainable development. While some of our case studies are wanting to grow slowly and do not wish to cater for mass tourists, others are concerned about their economic viability. Being small and Indigenous can be an impediment to receiving the level and types of support they need in a competitive and mature industry. In Fiji, small, locally or Indigenous-owned enterprises can often struggle to get the recognition and market access that large resorts in the coastal areas take for granted. Meanwhile, at Aboriginal Cultural Tours of South Australia, receiving accolades for Aboriginal cultural tourism did not mean a financially secure business; Quentin still works solely out of one vehicle, which is his office as well as his touring vehicle. Governments and business associations could do more than just leveraging off the interest in cultural tourism—these businesses need access to support including credit, technical and marketing assistance. From a policy and planning perspective, where legislation recognising Indigenous values is non-existent, the SDGs could place the onus on local authorities and central governments to be more mindful about supporting Indigenous businesses.

This research has identified how tourism can address SDGs in ways that respect Indigenous priorities and enable meaningful outcomes for a range of specific Indigenous enterprises and Indigenous communities in tourism destinations. Existing organisations such as WINTA provide the opportunity for Indigenous tourism operators to discuss, and direct, the implementation of the SDGs with support from the UN and international bodies such as the UNWTO. The framework of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (2008) could provide further impetus in terms of valuing Indigenous tourism businesses and their contributions to sustainable development. However, whether the SDGs provide a mechanism alongside the UNDRIP to improve the circumstances of Indigenous peoples remains to be seen (Hutchison et al., 2021). This paper stresses the need for Indigenous groups to have a platform or platforms to provide an Indigenous voice in SDG implementation, especially when this occurs on ancestral lands.

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