Indigenous Tourism and Reconciliation: The Case of Kitcisakik Cultural Immersions

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Chapter Summary

This case study explores an initiative originating in the Anicinape community of Kitcisakik, Québec. The community hosts non-Indigenous students for an experiential and immersive outdoor engagement with Anicinape ways. Innovative ways of learning about an Indigenous culture and related sociopolitical issues are considered acts of building reconciliation, via the lens of an Anicinape land-based pedagogy.

For nearly a decade, the semi-nomadic community of Kitcisakik (population c.380), located within the boundaries of La Vérendrye Wildlife Reserve in the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region of Québec, has hosted non-Indigenous high school and university students enabling them to experience living ‘off the land’, whilst concurrently sharing Anicinape culture and tradition. The initiative started with a community desire to share, celebrate, and transmit Anicinape culture, while re-appropriating wider territories of their ancestral land, on which they unofficially reside. It evolved into a grassroots social economy initiative, offering short- and medium-term land-based expeditions for students, who share in a diverse range of activities, such as hearing testimonials from Residential School survivors; participating in talking circles about territorial politics; observing winter forest trapping; sharing knowledge about traditional medicines; the preparation and eating of traditional foods; joining indigenous art and crafts workshops; sharing in sweat lodge ceremonies; or, playing hockey.

This prescient initiative began informally around 2010 and gradually evolved into a positive way to revitalize local culture, and improve the intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge within the community. Importantly, it also generated dialogue with non-Indigenous youth, who learn about Kitcisakik’s Indigenous

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culture whilst experiencing living ‘off the land’, leading to Indigenous resurgence. In addition, such cross-cultural encounters have reduced community isolation, and encouraged a form of collective mobilization. While the initiative is internally acknowledged to strengthen individual and collective skills, it has potential to generate employment and revenue, contributing to a wider economic and social undertaking that respects Anicinape values.

Kitcisakik’s experiential education initiative foreshadowed Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Committee’s Call to Action to include Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in Canadian curricula to aid a process of reconciliation. This case study demonstrates how visiting the community and experiencing Kitcisakik through Indigenous land-based pedagogies is an opportunity for building intercultural understanding and citizen awareness of Indigenous histories and cultures, while learning specific principles of the Anicinape way and the current issues the community faces in a modern Canada. This is an exceptional example of the reconciliation process in action.

**Learning Objectives:**

1. Explore how a disadvantaged population with extremely limited resources has developed an experiential educative tourism initiative that engenders reconciliation at the same time as revitalizing local culture, leading to Indigenous resurgence;
2. Relate the politics of reconciliation to the way education tourism can support land claims and self-determination;
3. Consider some of the cultural and epistemological barriers to develop an efficient and well managed tourism initiative;
4. Explore settler education opportunities existing within such experiential grass-root and land-based initiatives; and
5. Understand an Indigenous perspective of sustainability.

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2 Simpson (2011) defines Indigenous resurgence this way: “reinvesting in our own ways of being; regenerating our intellectual and political traditions; articulating and living our legal traditions; language learning; creating and using our artistic and performance-based traditions. All of this requires us to reclaim the very best practices of our traditional cultures, knowledge systems in the dynamic, fluid, compassionate, respectful context in which they were originally generated” (pp.7, 18).
For some 40 years, nation states that endured or provoked violence, oppression and/or internal ethnic conflicts, have searched for mechanisms to foster reconciliation by acknowledging past oppression and barbarity, and seeking to create conditions facilitating the harmonious coexistence of all involved parties (Coulthard, 2014; Gaertner, 2014). In Canada, this age of apology in an apparent era of reconciliation (Gaertner, 2014) led to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2008-2015). The TRC’s outcomes appear to have prompted a new phase in the relationship between non-Indigenous settlers and Indigenous peoples. The Final Report (2015) recommends creating mutually respectful dialogue aimed at guiding public policies to “mitigate intercultural conflict, build citizen confidence, and build social and economic capacities” (TRC, 2015, p.142). This case study explores an initiative from the Indigenous community of Kitcisakik, Quebec, which receives non-Indigenous students for an educative immersion in Anicinape ways. Innovative, experiential ways of learning about Indigenous cultures and sociopolitical issues help build reconciliation via an Indigenous land-based pedagogical lens.

Grass-root Indigenous tourism initiatives can instil an Indigenous resurgence considered key for Indigenous healing and reconciliation (Simpson, 2011). Such initiatives can educate non-Indigenous settlers and raise awareness about the politics of self-determination and current Indigenous land claim issues. Although research has not yet linked these issues to the decolonization movement, many argue that Indigenous tourism, undertaken responsibly, is at the root of meaningful local development (e.g., Colton 2005; Colton & Whitney-Squire 2010; Lynch, Duinker, Sheehan, & Chute, 2010; Whitney-Squire, 2016; and Cassel & Maureira, 2017). An accepted definition of Indigenous tourism states it is: “tourism activity in which Indigenous people are directly involved either through control and/or having their culture serve as the essence of the attraction” (Hinch & Butler, 1996, p.9; see also Ewert & Shultis, 1997; Colton & Whitney-Squire, 2010). Based on Bell’s (1999) Aboriginal Community Development Framework, Colton & Whitney (2010) evaluated some 20 indigenous tourism case studies from around the world that are based on a “paradigm that seeks to restore the relationships broken in aboriginal communities by generations of oppression” (p.264). In general, these studies established Indigenous tourism initiatives have the potential to strengthen community empowerment, economic development, wellness, learning, and stewardship (Colton & Whitney-Squire, 2010).

In Canada, various projects have highlighted Indigenous tourism has the potential to protect, preserve and revitalize traditional culture and knowledge by strengthening community ties (e.g., Lynch & al., 2010 Colton 2005, Colton & Whitney-Squire 2010, Cassel & Maureira 2015). For example, in Mi’kmag communities, involving Elders (traditional knowledge holders) with youth in a tourism initiative initiated dialogues, and re-established and strengthened intergenerational communication (Lynch et al. 2010). In addition, by offering a wide range of outdoor activities, the Mi’kmaq initiative is an opportunity to give new life to land-based practices and reconnect communities with their ancestral territory (Cassel & Maureira, 2015).

In this climate, such initiatives serve political claims since they allow communities to occupy their ancestral land and reassert their sovereignty (Menzes & Butler, 2007). Similarly, basing community activities in a respectful and harmonious relationship with the land generates the possibility of creating alternative economic models, promoting economic independence, and enabling a level of self-determination (Menzes & Butler, 2007). This was expressed by members of the Woodland Cree First Nation in Canada’s North, where their tourism initiative was grounded in the desire to escape relationships of state dependency by strengthening
community control of traditional resources to achieve equitable development encompassing a range of economic, social, cultural, political, and environmental factors (Colton, 2005). However, for these initiatives to materialize, it is essential that Indigenous communities place themselves at the center of such projects and maintain control over them (Zeppell, 1998).

Cultural homogenisation and globalization encourage increasing numbers of travelers to seek tourism experiences of cultural difference and exoticism (Bruner, 1995). The purpose of travel is variable; the involvement of tourists, in terms of their willingness to learn and involvement in the experience, is changing. Interactions between hosts and tourists can lead to questions about the cultural identity and authenticity of initiatives (Clifford, 1997). Travelers' expectations and prejudices are sometimes predetermined and lead to ignorance about the hybrid and dynamic identity, and way of life of Indigenous communities (Shoebridge, 2013). In this regard, to preserve and share indigenous values and culture, and not be absorbed in the mere commodification of their culture, host communities need to develop a fine understanding of the dilemmas associated with tourists' expectations.

Western tourism tends to confuse Indigenous tourism with ecotourism (White, et al., 2013). The latter refers to activities conducted in a sustainable and environmentally friendly manner (White et al., 2013). Nevertheless, Western conceptions of ecotourism often imply an imperialist vision of the environment. Any relationship that is symbolic, cultural, or spiritual is often discarded in favor of its simple commercialization (Poirier, 2007). Consequently, it is imperative Indigenous communities be wary of the influence of external forces, otherwise the aspirations of holistic community development could be undermined (White et al., 2013). As a growing sector, ecotourism attracts more and more tourists; the expectations and pressures they cause could ‘contaminate’ the authenticity of Indigenous tourism, and even increase the process of cultural dispossession (Shoebridge 2013, Butler & Menzies 2007).

However, the previously mentioned Mi'kmaw study determined cultural tourism to have the ability to “dispel cultural stereotypes and correct inaccurate and archaic images that tourists possess about aboriginal culture” (Lynch & al., 2010, p.68). Experiential activities making use of the senses, such as outdoor activities or storytelling, encourage cultural learning by tourists (Spark, 2002). Hosts are also often aware of their product’s educational potential. Another Mi'kmaw initiative demonstrated the willingness of hosts to educate visitors about historical and contemporary realities of political and legal issues, and the effects of colonialism on their community (Colton & Harris, 2007).

Finally, exposure to Indigenous realities allows educational visitors to experience firsthand the harsh contrast with their own lived reality, and question how such a situation occurred, and continues today in one of the richest western countries. Such questioning, it is believed, will lead students toward an understanding of their role in the process of reconciliation.
The Innovation

Case Context

For nearly a decade, the semi-nomadic community of Kitcisakik, located within the boundaries of La Vérendrye Wildlife Reserve in the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region of Canada’s Québec province, has received non-Indigenous high school, college, and university students to experience living ‘off the land’, thereby sharing Anicinape culture and tradition. Since the early 20th century, a gradual invasion of Anicinape territories by settlers via the industrial intensification of forestry and mining activities, creation of hydroelectric power generation projects and a formal road system in the Wildlife Reserve, and related leisure-based activity meant that by the early 1980s, formerly nomadic families were scattered in a few settlements throughout their territory (Leroux, Chamberland, Brazéo, & Dubé, 2004). Such developments ultimately led to the semi-sedentarization of Indigenous families (Teasdale, 2006: 109. Today, members of Anicinape community live alternately between a historic gathering site on the shores of Great Lake Victoria and a settlement made of small houses near the Dozois reservoir (Saint-Arnaud & Papatie, 2012). Resisting the idea of being displaced within the reserve system governed by Canada’s 1876 Indian Act, the community is forced to illegally ‘occupy’ their ancestral lands, an area that is ‘owned’ by the Crown (Girard, 2008). By rejecting to live on reserve, the community exists in conditions of extreme precarity, where homes lack running water and electricity, and government support is scarce (Girard 2008, Leroux et al. 2004). When combined with the suffering endured within the Residential School system by many in the community, such ongoing pressures have led to drastic changes in people’s lifestyles threatening traditional and cultural practices rooted in their relationship to the land (Leroux et al., 2004; Uprety, Asselin, & Bergeron, 2013). Additionally, assimilation policies, in concert with environmental pressures, threaten Anicinape heritage, particularly among the youngest community members (Saint-Arnaud & Papatie, 2012, Uprety et al., 2013).

This prescient initiative began informally around 2010, some 5 years before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s final report, and is now seen as a positive way to revitalize local culture, improve intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge within the community, and generate dialogue with non-Indigenous youth. Internally, the sharing of stories and teachings by Elders encourages youth and other community members to revive their interest in, and learn about, traditional ways that would otherwise be lost. Externally, non-Indigenous students learn about Anicinape and Indigenous cultures, their economic and political realities, and experience living off the land. Such cross-cultural encounters help to reduce community isolation, and ultimately encourage a form of collective mobilization, which can be associated with Indigenous resurgence. It also encourages students to critically consider the plight of an Indigenous community some 400kms from Ottawa, Canada’s national capital.
The community receives about 10 groups of school, college, or university students throughout each year. Groups comprise between 15 and 40 individuals. Their experience lasts 4 to 10 days. Group activities are scheduled in accordance with local members’ availabilities, seasonal-appropriate activities, and visitors’ special interests. Specific content can include discussing community land-claim issues, participating in projects fulfilling specific community needs such as gardening, distributing water and firewood to families, or visiting and helping the poorest families. A non-intensive itinerary leaves time for spontaneity so students can spend time getting to know community members and discuss shared interests. Additionally, all visitors participate in traditional activities such as the gathering, cooking, and serving of traditional food; preparing teepees for accommodation; and, collecting fir branches (sapinage) for use in sleeping arrangements. Other general activities include observing winter forest trapping of small animals for food and pelts; fishing; sharing knowledge about traditional medicines; preparing and eating traditional foods; participating in indigenous art and crafts workshops; sweat lodge ceremonies; community gardening; and playing hockey with community members.

Stakeholders Involved

The Kitcisakik Anicinape community comprises some 380 people of the Algonquin First Nations. It is located within La Vérendrye Wildlife Reserve in Québec’s Abitibi-Témiscamingue region. Kitcisakik is the primary stakeholder: it conceived the initiative, invites visitors to spend time in the community, and share their lives, culture, and experiences in an educational setting. Whilst the initiative was originally informal and managed by volunteers, over the last 4-5 years, it has become more formally integrated into the wider community. Currently it involves a considerable proportion of the population, and has been formally sponsored by the
community’s Chief and Band Council. It is now managed by Kitcisakik’s relatively newly-formed Intergenerational Tourism Committee (ITC), which is led by a recreation activator, employed by the Council, one of whose roles is to organize all visits, welcome students, and oversee their time in the community. The recreation advisor also hires some key community members who act as helpers, guides, and cooks for the visitors.

Whilst the initiative is independent, informal and grassroots, several attempts have been made to partially integrate it within regional tourism networks led by organizations such as Québec Aboriginal Tourism (http://www.quebecaboriginal.com) and Abitibi-Témiscamingue Tourism (https://www.abitibi-temiscamingue-tourism.org) which develop and promote more market-based tourism products. Although the initiative is occasionally promoted by these organizations, no formal relation exists. Another such organization, the Société des établissements de plein air du Québec (Sépaq), whose mandate is to “manage and develop public territories and the tourism facilities entrusted to it”, is responsible for provincial tourism facilities, wildlife and natural reserves. Their relationship with Kitcisakik can invoke tensions, primarily located within land rights claims. The community never formally participated in negotiations with the Crown, preferring instead to occupy the land they see as theirs. As previously noted ‘ownership’ of the land where the Anicinape settlement and its ancestral territory are situated is under dispute. However, the experiential tourism initiative is tolerated so long as it doesn’t compete with these other organization’s programs of activity, as it broadly conforms to Sépaq’s mission and mandate.

Kitcisakik’s visitors are drawn from a number of mostly francophone schools, colleges, and universities based primarily in Québec province. Despite the Call to Action of the TRC’s final report, the experiential visits do not form part of any official curriculum. Often, visits are organized by students themselves, as an extra-curricular activity: they want to learn the history of Canada’s Indigenous peoples, and understand their current situation. They are usually assisted by a teacher or professor. Each group consists of between 15 and 40 individuals, depending on the organizer’s abilities to recruit students to raise the funds necessary for their visit (approx. $100CAD per day inclusive of travel, accommodation, food, and activities). Prior to their visit, students can undertake a variety of informal activities to ensure they have some kind of basic understanding of the situation they will encounter: nothing is uniform and depends on individual cohorts and their teachers. During their visit, as described elsewhere, they engage in a wide-range of community-based activities, sharing their experiences with community members. Post-visit, and their encounter with Anicinape culture, the majority of students hold debriefing sessions to discuss their experience and try to assimilate all of the information they have accumulate. Over the past 8 years many schools, colleges, and universities repeat their visit; professors involved in previous trips, seeing the educational impact and value of the experience, organize subsequent trips for new student cohorts.

Approach Used and the Impact

To participate in the process of reconciliation, the innovative Kitcisakik initiative relies heavily on core notions of experiential learning, knowledge transfer and mobilization, and Indigenous resurgence, whilst challenging the historical and social conventions underpinning settler colonialism. At the centre of the innovation is the desire by members of a small, semi-nomadic Indigenous community to develop a means of intracommunity intergenerational knowledge transfer, from Elders to youth, thereby subsequently encouraging Indigenous resurgence. Informally, by enabling non-Indigenous youth to experience Anicinape culture, the initiative...
notably foreshadows the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s 2015 call for Indigenous “historical and contemporary contributions” to be recognized in Canadian curricula (p.7); the experience nudges students to question the contrast between two Canadian paradigms: Western and Indigenous.

Students visiting the community under the initiative learn through first-hand experience something of the lives of residents: their everyday milieu, historical antecedents, traditional customs and practices, current anxieties over land and identity, relationship to the land and respectful harvesting of local flora and fauna, quiet nobility in the face of vicious oppression, and renewed hope of equitable recognition in their homeland. This is something that cannot be easily taught in a classroom setting, from a textbook, or by a non-Indigenous teacher. They understand being immersed in the quotidian mundanity of ordinary lives, living off the land, viscerally witnessing the deprivation of taken-for-granted amenities and denial of basic services.

Prior to the student’s arrival, the community activator arranges basic accommodation, sleeping quarters, food, and water. They also collaboratively co-create an itinerary of activities with the students to address key issues and topics students want to discuss and experience. As previously stated, these activities are based across the community; some are indoor, many are outside on the land. Often students will listen to Elders and others talking firsthand about the trauma and suffering caused by the Residential School system, and their paths to healing. Exposure to these direct testimonies has a very powerful effect on most students and awakens them to the institutionalized racism, cultural genocide, and abuse directed toward Indigenous peoples less than a generation ago. Elders also share their views on the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (http://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca). Other talking circles locate the community’s perspective on land issues and territorial politics, allowing students to understand a wholly different perspective to social life; for example, the Forest Committee organizes a talk about current land claims, land rights, and political tensions. Other indoor activities are culturally-based, delivered via traditional handicraft workshops, which not only teach how things are made, but also explain their significance in relation to a respectful and sustainable land-based existence. As artifacts are being made, stories are being told, so the whole workshop becomes an immersive experience. Bridging indoors and outdoors, students become intimately involved in the preparation, cooking, and eating of traditional food. The preparations include ongoing dialogue about the meanings inherent in practice, acknowledging the respect Indigenous peoples have for the land, crops, and animals they need to survive. Similarly, local knowledge bearers will engage in discussions about traditional medicines, allowing students to gain insight into an aspect of Indigenous spirituality. Continuing this theme, students may also participate in sweat lodges, a traditional ritual steam bath which is sometimes associated with spiritual purification, and is connected to Anicinape worldviews. Moving outside to the land, students help gather crops, witnessing the community’s central relationship to the land. During summer, visitors will be able to fish and observe traditional hunting practices; in winter, they will be able to see how forest traps are made, set, and retrieved. Individually, each activity relates an aspect of community life for the inhabitants. Cumulatively, they powerfully immerse students in the lived reality of an Indigenous community.

The schedule allows considerable time and space for visitors to develop relationships with those welcoming them to the community. Quite often, it is through these more informal times that the most powerful communication and understanding can take place. Through such experiences, students gain valuable insight into conditions surrounding everyday life in Kitcisakik. Such insight, gained by experiencing the lived reality of an Indigenous community engenders a critical appraisal of the situation which can open up pathways to reconciliation.
Experiential learning achieves: (i) a deeper understanding of content; (ii) developing the capacity for critical thinking and the application of knowledge in complex or ambiguous situations; and the ability to foster lifelong learning in the workplace (Eyler, 2009). It also privileges a higher degree of knowledge transfer (e.g., Lovelace (2013) between community members and visitors. Such knowledge transfer continues when the students return to their institutions: they talk to friends and families about their experience, spreading what they have learned. In turn, such knowledge transfer leads to knowledge mobilization - students embed their learning into their lives, which research indicates, can completely and positively modify their attitude toward Canada’s Indigenous peoples. At the same time, they start to actively question many of the things they have taken for granted all their lives, such as access to clean water and sanitation, access to electricity, education and health care. They question how, in 21st century Canada, such inequality can exist.

There are many impacts from the Kitcisakik initiative, some felt within the community, and others experienced by student visitors.

Positive community impacts can best be summarized in the words of members [author’s translation from French]. For clarity they have been separated into two distinct groupings: reconciliation and resurgence.

Reconciliation:

I think the initiative is a good thing … [the impacts won’t be felt] … right now but in 5 or 10 years, non-Indigenous and indigenous peoples will get along better. If we continue with the visits, they enable this contact. (Member #1).

So, the young people that came are now much more aware, that is like some reconciliation between individuals. (Member #2).

The fact that the … [students]… come to visit [Kitcisakik], it helps a lot. They see how we live, how we have respect for the world, then the fact that the world come to see us, they will tell their friends that we are nice, we are welcoming with the outside world. Then I hope it will make things [reconciliation] happen. (Member #3).

It could help [experiential education], it could help, why we struggle to live on our territory, you know, there are many things that non-native people criticize us for, while it is they who should reconcile with Indigenous peoples. (Member #4).

Resurgence:

Visitors want to learn, and at the same time, our people that lived outside of the community, it allows them to learn as well … [about] … our own roots and culture. Really, I have learnt a lot [about my cultural practices] during the student visits, I didn’t know how to plant fir trees (sapinage) and I realized I was learning at the same time as the students. But the traps and the fishing, I was already able to do that. It’s been a long time since I know how to fish and trap. I was already taught when I was younger. (Member #1).

Me, I think that without the initiative, no youth would get involved in cultural activities, they would not find the motivation to do so. (Member #3).
What Elders know ... they know a lot of things ... during visits, they teach the students, and they teach us at the same time. (Member #5).

I'm still young, so I'm still learning from Elders. When I see Elders during the visits, people older than me get involved, so I'll be there, and then I'll just watch them, how they do it. That's how I learn. (Member #6).

Student impacts, and their reflections, are also perhaps best expressed in their own words [author’s translation from French], collected as data in an ongoing research project between the community and the authors:

**Experiential education:**

Really if I summed up the five years of history that I had at school, even if everything was taken into consideration, I do not think I learned a quarter of what I saw [during my time in the community] ... I experienced Kitcisakik for 10 days, that's all. And the number of things I learned, it's pretty huge in proportion to what I knew. (Student #1).

The rhythm that is different, but that is super interesting because it also gives the opportunity to take time with others, it's cool too. And it was also cool to be in the woods with them, to see how it's all happening, to take the time there to talk, to produce cultural material, to see its importance and all. It's another perspective. By having Indigenous teachers, it also helps to understand this feeling of community; we have more of an inner perspective ... [in school] we have books, documents, but it has nothing to do with human contact. This is ... more factual, relevant, interesting, and I think it's essential to have that perspective to better understand [the Indigenous perspective]. (Student #2).

**Land-based education (Anicinape ways):**

In the woods, it's really different as an environment and atmosphere, and I really adored it, that's where we learned a lot in a short time [...] and there, we had to give tobacco [a sacred plant], you must spread tobacco for the spirits, for everything one takes from nature, it is necessary to give back. (Student #3).

All the knowledge of herbs, plants, natural resources in general, the link with nature is strong. When we went to do fir branches ... I said to myself intuitively, 'it's not necessarily correct to remove branches randomly', but at the end, they give back to nature ... when they fish with a net they give back to nature, there are fish they do not take. There is a link that is even stronger because they live off nature, off natural resources. So, they give back more, there is more of a consideration in this regard ... One of the things that struck me most was spirituality, we were talking and the subject came to spirituality. Theirs is an inclusive spirituality, so interesting with the use of natural resources in practices. It really captivated me ... it is done with respect to nature, and in respect of all peoples. (Student #4).

All the parts of the animal are important, they all have utility, we realize that finally, it is the Anicinape philosophy. By speaking with people, you understand how they live this [life]... and what their relationship with each other is, with nature, but also about their relationship with the past too. I think I learned a lot also about their process of healing, the ceremonies [involved]... (Student #2).
Land claim politics, dispossession and settler colonialism

This visit made me finally begin to understand what settler colonialism and [land] dispossession mean, how Indigenous peoples are displaced into reserves; but here they are still resisting and claiming their territory and ways of life. (Student #5).

We knew that there were a lot of land claims. But their territory ... the whole Sépaq park is their territory. So, it was really [challenging] to see that evolution ... for example, Kitcisakik and Lac Simon, before it was the same thing. I really didn’t know that basically it was the same community. But with the advent of the reserve [system], it split the community in two, and it made big internal divisions, and it’s really sad the way it happened. The people from Lac Simon are those who have accepted to live on reserve, while in Kitcisakik it’s like the resistance. They did not want to leave their territory, they did not want to be governed, or rather controlled by the government. I find it’s a good thing from their side, it’s really good that they fight for their rights and their cultural heritage. (Student #3).

Over the years, as the initiative developed and academic interest increased, the program began to be co-created. For example, teachers accompanying student groups requested the inclusion of specific topics in the sharing circle part of the itinerary.

The overall feedback from students indicates quite clearly their appreciation for the opportunity to share the lived experience of Kitcisakik’s population, albeit for a short period of time. Time and again, students were asked: “Would you have learnt so much in class?”; the resounding answer was always: “No!”.

Implications & Lessons learned

This case study highlights clearly the internal and external benefits of an Indigenous education and tourism initiative in line with Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls for Action. As mentioned, both community and members benefit significantly from the initiative: the benefits are primarily introspective, prompting an Indigenous resurgence via intracommunity knowledge transfer and mobilization from Elders to youth. Indigenous culture and practices are enabled to flourish where quite recently they were in sharp decline. The community benefits materially too: the initiative provides a certain level of employment and generates direct income for the community (if partnered with external organizations, a significant element of the revenues would be retained outside the community). The initiative also acts to build capacity amongst those involved; particularly youth whose work hosting the visitors and organizing and delivering content provides them with opportunities to learn new skills that advance them individually. The experience also allows community members to enjoy a slightly less isolated relation to the world outside.

Students clearly benefit from the experience. In an intense period, they are introduced to several important concepts which educational curricula currently ignore. These include confronting the underlying sociopolitical and jurisdictional tensions between Canada’s Indigenous peoples and settlers regarding the wider use of a contested/claimed ancestral territory that centers land at the heart of reconciliation processes. Students also learn for the first time about living in harmony with nature and living off the land in sharp contrast to the exploitative capitalistic system in which they grew up. Exposure to Anicinape culture and ecological practices via advanced holistic and experiential land-based pedagogies rooted in Indigenous culture enables post-visit students to more critically engage with Canadian society. They are also able to relay their experience to peers.
which mobilizes their learning and further disseminates the cultural ideas they were exposed to. This furthers the cause of reconciliation.

Educators can view the Kitcisakik initiative as a model for engaging with other Indigenous communities to build experiential learning and Indigenous pedagogies into curricula, in line with the TRC’s Calls for Action. By replicating the initiative, more non-Indigenous Canadian youth would be confronted with their unacknowledged privilege and immersed into a parallel culture that they are largely unaware of. It would also allow for a regeneration of Indigenous culture within communities as knowledge passes from Elders to youth. Education tourism practitioners need to respect Indigenous ways of being that do not replicate profit-based corporate goals. They also need to recognize the educational value of Indigenous knowledge holders, despite their not having recognized tourism credentials. Such people have extensive knowledge regarding living off the land, indigenous culture, traditions, and philosophy.

Overall, Kitcisakik has created an initiative which has opened up a range of innovative pathways to both reconciliation and resurgence.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Specifically, how does experiential learning enable students to understand the plight of Canada’s Indigenous peoples in ways they couldn’t in the classroom?
2. Why doesn’t the Kitcisakik initiative not formally integrate with existing regional tourism networks?
3. How can such as intercultural encounters advance reconciliation?
4. How can knowledge mobilization via experiential educational tourism advance Indigenous land claims and self-determination?
5. Why have Canada’s educators been so slow in responding to the TRA’s calls to incorporate Indigenous histories and contemporary situation into the curriculum?

**References**


Authors

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