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Towards Decolonization: Indigenizing Resort Governance in Canada

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Introduction

For more than a century, aboriginals (aka First Nations) in Canada have struggled to regain sovereignty rights over territories they traditionally inhabited prior to past colonization processes. This struggle has been particularly apparent in British Columbia, where formal cessation of sovereignty rights to the provincial government was infrequent. As a consequence, about 90% of British Columbia's land base is currently in varying stages of aboriginal land claim negotiation via on-going treaty-making processes. At stake in these deliberations is the extent to which aboriginals have rights to own, manage and reap benefit from resource development on their former traditional territories. Despite on-going delays and setbacks in reaching treaty claim settlements, a slowly emerging set of legally binding Supreme Court of Canada decisions are now providing governments and First Nation stakeholders with increasing clarity on the legal parameters determining the extent to which aboriginal land and title rights exist, as well as the 'due diligence' obligations that both parties are required to meet in settling such claims (Christie, 2015). These rulings have simultaneously led all parties to seek more expedient resolutions to existing treaty negotiations and to collaborate in interim land use agreements while outstanding land claim processes run their course. While such agreements primarily involve land and resource development projects associated with British Columbia's forestry, mining and fishing sectors, more recently some have emerged related to tourism. This has encouraged a growing number of aboriginal communities to leverage their emerging rights for tourism purposes (O'Neil and Williams, 2013; Stoddart, 2014).

Not the least of these tourism initiatives has surfaced in the Resort Municipality of Whistler, Canada's largest and one of North America's top rated alpine tourism destinations. This paper explores ways in which the Squamish and Lil'wat First Nations leveraged their participation in the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games (the Games) to embed themselves in the on-going governance of Whistler, the host mountain resort for that mega-event.

Conceptually the paper is framed by the constructs of resort governance and indigenous decolonization. It depicts resort governance as 'contested terrain' in

which forces of resistance locked into traditional colonization practices are challenged by decolonization processes supported by emerging aboriginal legal and social licenses (Business Council of British Columbia, 2015). From an applied perspective, the paper illustrates how First Nations leveraged unprecedented governance legacies through their strategic engagement in the Games. Collectively the findings contribute to an emerging decolonization literature related to destination tourism management (Falcous, 2007; Chambers and Buzinde, 2015; Holst, 2015).

Defining governance and decolonization

In recent years, neo-liberal agendas and the downsizing of governments have led to merged responsibilities for governance between public and private institutions (Editors' note: also see Simmons, this volume). The term 'governance' "draws attention to the processes and interactions through which all kinds of social interests and actors combine to produce the policies, practices and effects that define current patterns of governing" (Bevir, 2011:1). In its broadest sense, governance identifies "who has power, who makes decisions, how other players make their voice heard and how account is rendered" (Institute on Governance, 2016). As Bevir (2011) observes, this poses dilemmas with respect to developing strategies that span jurisdictions and various levels of government, and requires the mobilization of a wide range of stakeholders. The complex processes and interactions of governance are especially evident in attempts to transition towards sustainable futures (see e.g. Loorbach, 2010). Recent studies of new collaborative governance approaches in tourist destinations have also highlighted the challenges of managing complex multi-stakeholder networks (e.g., Nordin and Svensson, 2005; Dredge, 2006; Lazeretti and Petrillo, 2006; Beritelli *et al.*, 2007; Baggio *et al.*, 2010; Gill and Williams, 2014). The introduction of new indigenous stakeholders into governance processes creates further complexities into the decision-making network, as elaborated on below.

Decolonization is the antithesis of colonization. In an indigenous context, colonization has been characterized "as an irresistible outcome of a multigenerational and multifaceted process of forced dispossession and attempted acculturation" (Alfred, 2009: 43). In a Canadian context, colonization has focused on separating aboriginal people from their traditional lands, culture, and community. The consequence of such actions has led to extensive political, economic and social dysfunction within many First Nations, as well as a "collective dependency on the state" (Alfred, 2009: 52). In contrast, decolonization is often portrayed as an on-going process offering multiple approaches for reconnecting indigenous nations with their traditional lands, resources and cultural practices. While the strategies employed operate in context-specific ways, they essentially involve initially regaining legal recognition and socio-political affirmation of indigenous traditional rights, and then introducing resurgence practices which foster personal and community self-governance capacity building (Corntassel, 2012). In a tourism context, "decolonial theory urges scholars to think of the possibility of another way of knowing about and being in tourism that does not privilege Western epistemologies" (Chambers and Budzinde, 2015: 5).

First Nations and decolonization

In many regions of the world, indigenous peoples have lost their traditional place-based existences through pervasive colonial governance systems intent on displacing aboriginal from their traditional lands, resources and livelihoods (Johnston, 2006). Countless post-colonial inquiries, reports, commissions and court rulings attest to the harmful physical, psychological, social and economic adversities that past colonial processes have wrought on indigenous culture. Such impacts extend to Canada where a steady flow of Royal Commissions and government inquiries recount the pervasive multigenerational and multifaceted effects of past French, British and Canadian colonial practices inflicted on aboriginals across the nation. Narratives of past indiscretions designed to force aboriginal dispossession and disconnection from their lands, cultures, and communities continue to emerge (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015).

In response to growing international and domestic support for the redressing of these injustices, aboriginals in Canada have embarked on decolonization processes designed to reclaim their lands and regenerate their communities (Aquash, 2011). Successful court victories in early treaty settlements in the 1970s, broader 'rights to use' rulings in the 1980s and 90s, and comprehensive title, accommodation and consent contestations in the new millennium have provided many aboriginal groups in Canada with hard won 'legal licenses to operate' on outstanding decolonization issues. Simultaneously, growing international and domestic awareness of past colonization impacts have supplied aboriginals with some of the 'social license' needed to extend the decolonization processes beyond the struggle for basic sovereignty rights towards governance priorities that build greater community capacity for self-reliance, foster cultural and economic resurgence, and engender social and professional relationship building (United Nations, 2007; Simpson, 2011; Burse, 2015).

Decolonization in a British Columbia context

Prior to its Confederation in 1867, Canada was colonized by France and Britain, who established treaties with aboriginal groups they encountered. The Canadian Courts have characterized these treaties as negotiated agreement processes in which aboriginal people 'gave up' their sovereignty over the lands they inhabited in exchange for land reserves and the right to hunt and fish on their relinquished territories. Not surprisingly, contestation between current aboriginal claimants and subsequent Canadian governments over the intent and interpretation of these treaties remain the focus of many decolonization initiatives occurring across the nation. The depth and breadth of decolonization issues is particularly apparent in British Columbia, where legally binding treaties between aboriginals and the Government of British Columbia were rarely completed.

The British-appointed Governor of the Colony of British Columbia originally negotiated 14 small land purchases with aboriginal groups in the 1850s. However, after the colony joined the Canadian Confederation in 1871, aboriginal title to the rest of the province was left unresolved. The Government of British Columbia took the position that, since the province did not recognize aboriginal title, there was no