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TACIT KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER: CROSS-CULTURAL ADVENTURE

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We show here that adventure tourism leads to transfer of tacit knowledge between international visitors and local residents in developing destinations; and that motivations for the locals include money and employment, social capital, and individual enjoyment. Over the past half century, adventure tourism has grown from decentralised domestic outdoor recreation, to a large international commercial industry. Many tours bring urban clients from developed nations to rural areas in developing nations, where there are icon sites for specific adventure activities (Buckley, 2010).

In some countries, tourists rely on local residents to provide outdoor expertise. Examples include: mountaineering in the Himalayas; game tracking in Africa and Asia; horse-riding in central Asia and Patagonia; and wilderness navigation and weather prediction, in many countries. In these cases, locals are already highly skilled, and tourists try to emulate them. In other countries, local residents have learned new adventure skills from tourists and expatriate guides. Examples include: rafting and kayaking, in Africa, central America and Asia; and surfing, in a number of Indian Ocean and Melanesian island nations (Baraka Films, 2011; Falho, 2012; Gahlaut & Thapa, 2005; Journeyman Pictures, 2007; White Nile Kayaking, 2012).

Such learning requires transfer of tacit knowledge (Collins, 2010; Polanyi, 1962): that is, knowledge that is not easily codified, may not be formally identified, and which can be acquired only through practice. Tacit knowledge transfer is one type of technology transfer, studied extensively in relation to multilateral government and corporate enterprises (Dhanaraj, Lyles, Steensma, & Tihanyi, 2004; Howells, 1996), and to a small degree in tourism (Singh & Hu, 2008), but not previously in adventure tourism. Motivations of adventure aficionados from developed nations have been examined extensively (Buckley, 2012; Kerr & Houge Mackenzie, 2012). Motivations of local residents in developing nations to acquire tacit knowledge from visiting tourists are previously unstudied. Here, therefore, we

present an exploratory, qualitative analysis of such motivations, and a framework for future research.

We adopted an emic approach, using multiple informal on-site interviews with the same informants over periods of days or weeks. Perspectives were obtained from individual locals, encountered during commercial adventure tours worldwide over the past decade, addressing the reasons why they had taken up various adventure activities. These self-defined statements have detailed contexts and were reconfirmed through multiple interviews, but are linguistically imprecise. We also obtained statements from structured individual interviews conducted specifically for this study. These are precise, contextualised, and cross-checked, but fewer in number. Each statement was disassembled into component concepts, which were coded as key words or phrases, and reassembled iteratively into higher-level constructs following standard qualitative approaches.

For destinations where locals already possessed skills valued by tourists, we collected information from over 80 individual informants. The activities concerned included trekking, mountaineering, horse riding, birdwatching and wildlife watching, including tracking skills. The countries concerned were: Botswana, Chile, Ecuador, India, Kenya, Madagascar, Mongolia, Namibia, Nepal, Tanzania, South Africa and Uganda. The majority of these cases involved wildlife safaris, where there is a degree of reciprocal transfer, but where local guides commonly have considerably greater tacit knowledge than most visiting tourists. The other cases involve horse-riding and high-altitude hiking, where the locals have lifetime skills that tourists admire and seek to acquire.

In these cases, we found that the local informants were motivated by employment opportunities and financial rewards. The principal keywords coded into this category include work, jobs, pay and money. In many areas, working in tourism can provide a cash wage which is not otherwise available. Guiding is highly paid, second only to senior management. Some locals have also received large cash tips, or gifts of significant value such as skis, kayaks, binoculars or climbing gear. Some have gained financially valuable advice and assistance in establishing their own commercial enterprises.

For destinations where international tourists, and expatriate tour operators and guides, possess skills which have been learned by at least some of the local residents, we collected

motivational statements from 32 individual informants. The activities involved were: climbing, diving, kayaking, rafting, skiing and surfing. The countries were: China, India, Maldives, Nepal, Papua Niugini, Russia, Uganda and Zimbabwe. These statements indicated that motivations for local residents in developing nations to gain expertise in adventure activities practised by visiting international tourists fall clearly into three distinct categories. Financial reward, as outlined above, is only one of these.

The second category includes various forms of social status or social capital. A wide range of different keywords and phrases were classified into this category. This status derives principally from the perception amongst peers, that the individuals concerned have expanded their opportunities by entering a world of wealthy international visitors, sharing their culture as well as speaking their language. In adventure activities where locals come into contact with sponsored professional athletes, e.g. for surfing in some Pacific and Indian Ocean island nations, locals perceive a distant but alluring potential opportunity to gain future sponsorship, funding and travel opportunities. Some informants had been given equipment, and some have received invitations to visit their new-found international friends. Peer pressure as such, however, was not mentioned as a motivation: none of the informants had learned adventure skills because of social pressure from their own colleagues.

The third category involves individual enjoyment, sometimes with subthemes of envy or curiosity. Keywords such as fun and play are typical, and key phrases such as 'I wanted to see what it was like', and 'Why should they have all the fun?' This may be seen as an example of the tourism demonstration effect (Fisher, 2004) as well as a transfer of tacit knowledge. This motivation may also be coupled with the possibility of future status and money. Locals, and indeed tourists, who learn to surf purely for personal pleasure, may nonetheless harbour secret dreams of becoming professional athletes, able to travel the world at their sponsors' expense. Even though a single motivation may be dominant and expressed at the time of interview, individual motivations may change over time. Since we recorded motivations from each informant over only a brief period, however, we cannot currently track these changes.

Whilst these three principal motivations are largely distinct, and most informants identified only one, some statements contained multiple keywords classified into different categories. If each informant is allocated an equal weight of 1.0, so that multiple motivations are allocated

partial weights of 0.5 or 0.33, then motivations can be summed across informants. This indicates that where locals gain tacit knowledge from tourists, money or work is the principal motivation for 67% of locals interviewed; social status and opportunities for 20%; and individual fun, play or enjoyment for 13%. Since the proportions for the three categories are not independent, but must sum to unity for each individual, self-perceived motivations can best be plotted and compared using a ternary plot (Shepard, 1954) (Figure 1).

Given this framework, we could now construct a survey instrument to quantify the relative importance of the three major motivations for specific individuals. Each individual could then be represented by a point within the triangle. That would allow us to compare locals from countries with different wealth, languages, and cultural traditions; and adventure activities with different popular perceptions of thrill, danger and social recognition. In addition, there are now local adventure tourism enterprises in some countries which are owned and staffed entirely by locals and cater almost entirely to domestic markets. Examples include rafting in Siberia, “river drifting” in eastern China, and “river walking” in Taiwan. The blending of tacit knowledge from international and domestic cultural sources in these cases would form another potential line of investigation.

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Figure 1. Ternary plot of main motivations. Values on the three axes sum to 1.0. *1, tourists learning from locals; *2, locals learning from tourists.

