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The politics of knowledge as a tourist attraction

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ABSTRACT

The past ten years have seen an increasing interest in the politics of knowledge production in tourism studies. However, tourists' hosts' politics of knowledge, the ways in which tourists' hosts can use local knowledge as both a tourist attraction and a way to negotiate power relationships, are yet to be explored. This article identifies the need for more analysis of the political uses of cultural knowledge as a tourist attraction, reporting on an ethnographic study of the politics of knowledge unfolded by an Aboriginal group of Western Australia in the context of their tour guiding activities. It will hopefully contribute to a better understanding of the political conditions, and potentials for, local cultural knowledge (re)production and utilization in tourism.

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Introduction

Recent contributions to tourism studies have been increasingly interested in the notion of knowledge and the analysis of the relations of power associated to the production of tourism knowledge (see for instance Ateljevic, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2011; Belhassen & Caton, 2009; Chambers & Buzinde, 2015). In this sense, the politics of tourism knowledge production are an increasingly well-discussed subject of inquiry and concern in tourism studies. The level of involvement of Indigenous people and epistemologies in the production of this knowledge, for instance, is one among many of the important issues pointed by this literature. The politics of knowledge that can be unfolded by tourists' hosts, however, are far less considered. In this respect, research dedicated to the analysis of local knowledge (the cultural or ecological knowledge of host communities), when this knowledge serves as a tourist attraction are not manifold. Furthermore, the socio-political conditions of the (re)production, circulation and uses of this knowledge in tourist settings, or the ways in which tourists' hosts can use it in order to confront, negotiate or resist existing power relationships are yet to be explored.

Yet, while contributions to tourism studies, and Indigenous tourism studies in particular, have stressed the importance of educating tourists as both a tourists' hosts' aspiration (Galliford, 2012; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2003) and a promising trend for tourism research and planning (Walker & Moscardo, 2016), authors such as Olsen (2002) or Galliford (2012) also describe situations where Indigenous tour guides' knowledge and their role of educating tourists can produce or reverse relations of power. Several authors, looking at the relationship between tourism and power, have also deconstructed earlier interpretations of power as something that could almost exclusively been exercised by the tourists (see for instance Cheong & Miller, 2000; Galliford, 2009; Leite & Graburn, 2009). Instead, these authors demonstrate that tourists' hosts are not passive victims

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of global tourism constraints and that they can equally shape tourists' behaviors (Cohen, 1985; Dahles, 2002; Holloway, 1981).

Although this body of work provides a powerful insight into the relationship between tourists' hosts' knowledge and the power Indigenous hosts can exercise when working as tour guides, there is still a critical need for tourism research to provide more analysis of the uses of local cultural knowledge as a tourist attraction and the relations of power these uses can serve or entail. For these analyses can help us build a better understanding of the political conditions of, and potentials for, local cultural knowledge (re)production and utilization in tourism.

The purpose of this article is to report on an ethnographic study of the politics of knowledge unfolded by Bardi and Jawi people, two Aboriginal groups of Western Australia, in the context of their tour guiding activities as an acknowledgement and contribution to this need. The Bardi-Jawi politics of knowledge will be used as an illustration of the significance of the direct relationship that can be drawn between the utilization of local cultural knowledge as a tourist attraction, or a means to educate tourists, and the relations of power that can unfold in this context. Indeed, this paper will show how, in teaching tourists, Bardi and Jawi tour guides also exercise a form of power and assert an authority to speak which can be seen as a pursuit of their claim to self-definition and self-determination.

This paper will begin with a broad discussion of the existing literature on knowledge and power in tourism studies, followed by an examination of the politics of knowledge unfolded by the Bardi and the Jawi. It will first describe the growing interest of tourism studies for knowledge as an agent of change and for the politics of tourism knowledge production. This article will also stress the significance of power as a well-discussed subject in tourism studies, sometimes associated with the role of tour guides, before pointing to the literature's failure to consider the role of tourists' hosts' knowledge and its use as both a tourist attraction and a political resource. The need for more analysis of the relationship between the use of tourists' hosts' knowledge as a tourist attraction and the (re)production of relations of power that this use can entail will then be emphasized before the research case study, its setting, conduct and outcomes are presented.

Knowledge and power in tourism studies

There has been a growing interest for knowledge in tourism studies in the past ten years, with several recent publications dedicated to the analysis of tourists' knowledge and skills (see for instance Huang, Gursoy, & Xu, 2014; Tsaur, Yen, & Chen, 2010) or the politics of knowledge management in tourism (cf. Cooper, 2006; Paraskevas, Altinay, Mclean, & Cooper, 2013) and a stronger focus on the politics of the production of tourism knowledge as both an epistemological and ethical concern (see for instance Ateljevic et al., 2011; Belhassen & Caton, 2009; Chambers & Buzinde, 2015; Fullagar & Wilson, 2012; Platenkamp & Botterill, 2013; Pritchard, Morgan, & Ateljevic, 2011; Pyo, 2012; Tribe, 2006; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016; Xiao & Smith, 2007).

The politics of tourism knowledge production

Many scholars working in tourism studies increasingly emphasize the need to include more of Indigenous or non-Western knowledge and epistemologies in the production of knowledge about tourism (Hollinshead, 1992; Nielsen & Wilson, 2012; Platenkamp & Botterill, 2013; Tribe, 2007; Whitaker, 1999), calling for a decolonization of social sciences (Denzin, Lincoln, & Tuhiwai-Smith, 2008; Grosfuguel, 2007) and tourism studies (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015).

Tourism studies also call for, and proved to support, more research and concern for community well-being (see for instance Higgins-Desbiolles, 2003; Hinch & Butler, 2007; Nielsen & Wilson, 2012; Weaver, 2010), issues of ethics (Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Jovicic, 2014; Weaver, 2014) and self-determination or empowerment in tourism (Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016). Eventually, there is also an growing number of research interested in Indigenous views on tourism (Berno, 1999; Bunten, 2010; Carr, 2007; Greathouse-Amador, 2005; Strickland-Munro & Moore, 2013; Theodossopoulos, 2010; Walker & Moscardo, 2016).

While it is widely acknowledged that tourism has often been used "as an economic development tool reflecting the rise of neo-liberal approaches to both tourism and community development" to which Indigenous people had to adapt (Walker & Moscardo, 2016, p. 1244; see also Greathouse-Amador, 2005; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006), tourism, and more particularly Indigenous tourism, is also increasingly seen as a "powerful social force" (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006) contributing to foster cross-cultural understanding and tourists' attitudinal change (Ballantyne, Packer, & Sutherland, 2011; Christie & Mason, 2003; Galliford, 2012; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2003, 2005; Scheyvens, 2002; Uriely, Reichel, & Ron, 2003; Walker & Moscardo, 2016; Weaver & Lawton, 2007) or to promote peace and justice (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2003, 2006; Scheyvens, 2002; Wearing, 2001).

Knowledge in tourism is thus also seen as an agent of change. Wearing (2001), for instance, describes volunteer tourism as having the potential to induce change in the views or attitudes of tourists and their hosts (see also Scheyvens, 2002; Sin, 2009; Uriely, Reichel, & Ron, 2003). In Australia, Higgins-Desbiolles (2003, p. 35) argues that Indigenous tourism can "contribute to the socio-cultural developments of a nation" and "foster social justice and reconciliation within a divided society". Using the Deleuze and Guattarian's (1987, p. 256) concept of becoming, Galliford (2012, pp. 404, 420) examines how tourists can indeed "become open to re-evaluating their previous thoughts, attitudes and opinions on Aboriginality" and "reflect more on fresh possibilities for their own subjective, *and* national, presence and belonging". Eventually, Walker and

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