Understanding Sustainable Tourism: A Comparative Analysis Between the Indigenous Tourism Industry and the Broader Tourism Sector in British Columbia

by

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Abstract

Tourism is one of the most dynamic businesses in the world. It is of great importance to intentionally and effectively plan and develop tourism sustainably by finding compromises between the economic, environmental and social priorities of communities affected by the sector. Indigenous tourism in British Columbia, Canada is one of the most rapidly growing industries in the local tourism economy. Yet little is known about how sustainable tourism is defined by Indigenous tourism stakeholders and whether it is properly addressed by regional and provincial tourism strategic policy and/or planning frameworks. This research aimed to tackle this knowledge gap by adopting a document analysis approach which identified common themes in the Indigenous Tourism of British Columbia's corporate strategies with the Government of British Columbia and Destination British Columbia's provincial tourism policy frameworks and regional destination development strategies. The research discovered that all strategies consist of similar priorities across the three dimensions of sustainable tourism, though the economic dimension takes precedence over the environmental and social dimensions. Above all, achieving sustainable tourism requires actively engaging and participating in reconciliatory efforts with Indigenous Peoples.

Keywords: Indigenous tourism; sustainable tourism development; Indigenous Peoples; British Columbia

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List of Acronyms

BC	British Columbia
DBC	Destination British Columbia
DMO	Destination Marketing Organization
ITAC	Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada
ITBC	Indigenous Tourism British Columbia
MTCAS	Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Sports
RDMO	Regional Destination Marketing Organization
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
VCM	Vancouver Coast and Mountains
WG	WG

Preface

My interest in Indigenous tourism comes from my desire to experience and learn more about Indigenous culture and ways of life in Canada. I have had the privilege to intentionally travel and participate in different Indigenous and ethnic minority tourism activities and experiences domestically and internationally to better educate myself as well as to connect with people whose culture differs from my own.

From my research, the Indigenous tourism industry spans across outdoor adventure, cultural experiences, nature and wildlife viewing tours, cuisine, festivities, and more. To better understand the industry I was studying, I participated in three different tourism offerings by kayaking in Whey-Ah-Wichen (Cates Park), visiting the Bill Reid Gallery of Northwest Coast Art, and dining at Salmon n' Bannock. After these experiences, I developed a new sense of appreciation for the uniqueness of the culture, people, and ways of life of the peoples who have inhabited these lands for thousands of years.

While I was unable to participate in an educational experience regarding the local history, stories, and wildlife, I was able to explore the calm and scenic waters, appreciate and explore the coasts, and view wildlife, such as seals and fish swimming in the waters.

Through the Bill Reid Gallery, I was able to immerse myself in the unique and remarkable art of the Northwest Coast. From this experience, I was able to transform my awareness of not only a subset of Indigenous art, but to understand how the pieces were a reflection and appreciation for the artists' culture and the expression of the issues raised from the impact of colonization, including the restrictions on language and tradition, removal of children from their families and communities, re-connecting to their identity and Haida roots, and emotions of fear, uncertainty and hope. Not only that, I discovered that the medium used for these pieces posed a deeper relationship between the artist and the materials, colors, details, and environment.

Similar to the previous experiences, Salmon n' Bannock taught me the value and importance of gathering place for food. The atmosphere, gave me a new sense of appreciation for a gathering place that focuses on Indigenous Peoples and the food. The atmosphere was welcoming, bright, and engaging – with walls adorned with decorated

art that represented the Indigenous Peoples and places that inspired each dish. Each piece in the restaurant and food item was chosen and made with intention and pride.

Each tourism offering was distinct from one another but they all generated a sense of community, pride, inclusiveness, and long-lasting teachings in relation to factual information and feelings of comfort. My initial journey through this research and experiences have immensely impacted my understanding of Indigenous Peoples, cultures, and ways of life. Moving forward, I intend to continue to further educate myself and to seek opportunities to visit and participate in many more Indigenous tourism activities available here in Canada.

Chapter 1.

Introduction

While the notion of sustainable development has been around since the 1970s (Milani & Keraghel, 2007; Shi et al., 2019), it was only until the 1990s when an impressive average annual growth rate of 4.3% in international tourism (Neto, 2003) generated serious concerns on how to maintain its dynamic growth without compromising or destroying the natural and built environments for current and future generations (Edgell, 2015; Garrigos-Simon, Narangajavana-Kaosiri & Lengua-Lengua, 2018; Niñerola, Sánchez-Rebull & Hernández-Lara, 2019; Ruhanen et al., 2015; UNDESA, 1999; UNWTO, 2019). The need to incorporate sustainable practices in tourism is compounded by the fact that this industry is a vulnerable and volatile source of income; competes for scarce resources, land, and water; exerts pressure on local communities; and is often extremely sensitive to actual or perceived changes in political, social and environmental conditions (UNEP & WTO, 2005). Consequently, international agencies have made considerable efforts in urging nations to integrate and implement the concept of sustainability into relevant tourism policies and planning strategies. This approach is viewed as a means to not only continuously expand and diversify the sector but to embrace socially and environmentally conscious practices and technologies (UN, 2020; Weaver, 2011; Bramwell et al., 2017; Eddins & Cottrel, 2013; Nguyen et al., 2019; UNDESA, 1999; UNWTO, 2019; ILO, 2022; Velasco-Herrejòn et al., 2022). What is being heralded as sustainable development, however, is criticized for favoring a more materialistic and individualistic Western worldview that marginalizes Indigenous perspectives. In doing so, it conflicts with how Indigenous populations are continuously being identified as a potential agent and beneficiary in numerous sustainability agendas, such as the *United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda)* (UNWTO, 2022).

While the UN *2030 Agenda* is meant to be adjusted to suit local circumstances, the universal nature of the framework remains heavily criticized for disregarding the diverse realities and paradigms despite consulting with Indigenous communities throughout the entire process (Yap & Watene, 2019; Canadian Coalition for International Cooperation, 2016). Specifically in Canada, the *Moving Forward Together: Canada's*

2030 Agenda National Strategy (Canada's 2030 Agenda) has been noted for its lack of Indigenous consultation and involvement with its development (AFN, 2021). Researchers argue that this serious limitation will fail to elicit real change in populations systemically at a disadvantage in areas attempting to adopt sustainable development concepts (Vásquez-Fernández & Ahenakew pii tai poo taa, 2020).

Indigenous tourism is often regarded as a possible vehicle towards achieving sustainable development as the core objectives are presumed to coincide with Indigenous culture, heritage, traditions, and linkages to their land. These qualities provide a critical foundation to stimulating economic development while simultaneously reinforcing cultural appreciation, revitalization, and preservation as well as raising awareness and supporting environmental conservation efforts (Butler & Hinch, 2007; Notzke, 2006; McIntosh, 2004; UN, 2015; UNWTO, 2019; UNEP & WTO, 2005). Accordingly, there is growing and ongoing interest and support in Indigenous communities, along with private, public, and philanthropic sectors seeking to generate tourism development strategies that would garner entrepreneurial opportunities (Graci et al., 2021; Tides Canada, 2018) outside of narrowly focused resource-extraction based economies in rural and remote regions (Kutzner & Wright, 2010; Williams & Peters, 2008).

This sustainability movement comes at a pivotal point for Indigenous Peoples in Canada, who face a myriad of pressures brought on by colonial legacies. Pervasive problems include historical and continual force to the outer fringes of mainstream society which hinders individuals and communities from gaining equal access to resources, and ignores their needs and desires (Schiffer & Schatz, 2008). This hardship extends to the Indigenous tourism industry in Canada as it continues to face numerous obstacles which may be attributed to the lack of self-determination, poor accessibility to local communities, difficulties producing market-ready products, and insufficient educational opportunities on business and management techniques (Lemelin et al., 2015; Thimm, 2019). The struggles generate concerns for the industry's continual sustainability. Even so, the overall rapid growth and competitiveness of the industry generates an opportunity to address prevalent issues that Indigenous Peoples experience. But engaging in this opportunity requires better coordination amongst all pertinent stakeholders in the sector (Phillips & Moutinho, 2014).

For those engaging in tourism as an economic strategy, the development and management should be handled with care pursuant to the diverse contexts, motivations and needs of businesses and communities as such sensitivity is central to their economic, political, social and cultural development. Regardless of the exclusion of Indigenous voices, provincial and territorial governments, regional and industry tourism associations are seeking to adopt the objectives and priorities outlined in national and international sustainability agendas. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the meaning of sustainable tourism to ensure that the needs of relevant Indigenous communities and businesses are met. Canada is a useful context to examine these issues as measures have been taken to enhance the well-being and opportunities available to Indigenous Peoples through legislation and policy commitments, such as *Canada's 2030 Agenda*.

Despite being an important matter, to my knowledge, no research has been conducted to determine the meaning of sustainable tourism in the Indigenous tourism industry in Canada. Rather, the existing literature in the Canadian context is limited and oftentimes outdated. Many of the studies in this field examine indicators of success (Lemelin et al., 2015), marketing (Williams & Richter, 2002), souvenir trade (Blundell, 1993), cultural sustainability (Thimm, 2019), resident perceptions of tourism development (Stewart & Draper, 2009), tourist demand (Williams & Stewart, 1997), as well as regional approaches to tourism development across the nation, specifically in Alberta (Notzke, 2004), the Arctic (Anderson, 1991; Notze, 1999), Nova Scotia (Lynch, Duinker, Sheehan & Chute, 2010), and Saskatchewan (Li, 2000). Therefore, this thesis intends to examine the following question: **How does the Indigenous tourism industry in British Columbia, Canada define sustainable tourism and to what extent is it reflected in broader regional and provincial tourism strategic policies and/or planning frameworks between 2016-2022?**

The scope of this study was determined by the release dates of the sustainability agendas. The question above may help discern any commonalities and variations on the concept of sustainable tourism and whether or not it is a critical feature in these documents. To this point, this research endeavor may provide necessary understanding on the degree to which the macro-level strategic tourism policy and planning in non-Indigenous governing institutions and associations are making serious efforts in advancing their duty to reconcile and collaborate with Indigenous Peoples.

Personal Note on Research Limitations

As a non-Indigenous student conducting research on the Indigenous tourism industry in Canada, it is important to acknowledge that the literature emphasizes that research *by* and *with* Indigenous Peoples is paramount (Butler & Hinch, 2007; Koster & Baccar & Lemelin, 2012) to decolonizing research and properly adopting Indigenous research paradigms, such as community-based and participatory approaches (Chilisa, 2017; Nicolaides & Raymaker, 2015; Pidgeon, 2019; Hart 2010). Furthermore, initial consultation with several Indigenous tourism stakeholders revealed that long-term relationship building, site visits and stays are fundamental to fostering mutual trust and a collaborative research partnership. I sought to follow these principles in an ethical and reflexive manner by reaching out to existing contacts as well as compiling an inventory of Indigenous tourism businesses, associations, and communities from the Indigenous Tourism British Columbia (ITBC) and Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC) membership list, Indigenous Services Canada's Indigenous Business Directory, and British Columbia's (BC) Data Catalogue for Indigenous Business Listings (ITBC, 2023; ITAC, 2023; ISC Business Development, 2022; Government of BC Regional Programs & Engagement, 2016). In addition, I conducted additional searches on Google, TripAdvisor, Instagram, and Facebook to include any non-members or businesses. I engaged with stakeholders through email, phone calls, and in-person visits regarding an open-ended research project that would be meaningful and valuable to the business or community. Although there was some initial interest, I was tempered by the complex realities of the research process especially with the need to respect the priorities and boundaries of those I connected with. After an extensive period of time was devoted to fieldwork-based research, but failing to recruit research partners and participants, I decided to rely on a document analysis approach to answer my research question. The analysis is expected to be limited by available data, and it would have benefitted from further detailed discussions and evaluations with Indigenous tourism stakeholders to determine the nuanced aspects of sustainable tourism that are vital to their businesses or communities. I can only hope that the information laid out portrays and provides accurate insight — even if only a fraction — in the pursuit for sustainable tourism.

There are several limitations to this study. First, documents are to be examined only in terms of the written content. Therefore, analysis did not include examining in-

depth perspectives from decision-makers or stakeholders pertaining to individual definitions of sustainable tourism nor does it reveal details about the consultation, formulation, and evaluation process of tourism policies and planning frameworks. To expand on this point, perspectives can vary from person-to-person or community-to-community; making it critical to understand the subtleties in sustainable tourism conceptualizations and priorities. It is necessary to acknowledge, however, that the results in most documents reflect the process and information gathered to a certain degree (Altheide, 2000). Notably, this limitation may provide a research incentive to delve further into this drawback to determine whether the documents' results show majority decision-making biases on any sustainable tourism definitions, aspirations or concerns in the industry. Third, great awareness of the context and social settings are necessary to grasp nuanced meanings and significances. Since I have little exposure to the broad tourism sector and its actors, this distances me from being truly familiar with the circumstances in which they work. This could result in contextual misinterpretation of the documents even with a general understanding gained from the grey and academic literature.

Definitions

This thesis refers to Indigenous Peoples as persons who self-identify as being of First Nation, Inuit, or Métis descent. Additionally, this thesis attempts to designate Indigenous Peoples by their preferred term of self-identification. Since the literature review includes research conducted within and outside of Canada, different terms related to Indigenous Peoples will be used throughout this report as a result of time periods, geographical context, Indigenous group of focus, and the way the study participant or group in the academic literature refers to their own ethnicity (Butler & Hinch, 2007).

Chapter 2.

Research Design and Methodology

The research applies a qualitative document analysis approach as it can act as a source to "reveal about the real (material) world [and] how they reflect the actions of interests of political actors or how they describe the contents of a given law, etc." (Karppinen & Moe, 2012, p. 9). It is also recognized as content analysis (Prior, 2003; Bowen, 2009) which is a technique that warrants a systematic procedure of finding, selecting, assessing and synthesizing data (Whitford & Ruhanen, 2010) into themes. Seen in previous tourism policy and planning research (Berg, 2001; Bowen, 2009), it is an appropriate method as all types of documents are capable of being examined and interpreted to elicit meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to a research question or problem (Merriam, 1988; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In support of this stance, documents for external communication, such as publications that depict an official perspective on a topic, issue, or process can be assessed (Kutsyuruba, 2017).

Case Selection

The available statistics and detailed profiles on Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous tourism at the provincial level is oftentimes limited and fragmented. Therefore, this section uses accessible provincial and national level information to describe the rationale for the case selection.

The Growing Indigenous Population

About 1.8 million Indigenous Peoples live in Canada, making up 5% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2021a). According to Statistics Canada's 2021 Census, BC is home to the second largest Indigenous population (290,210) in the country, making up 5.6% of the province's total population (5,214,805) (Statistics Canada, 2022; BC Government, 2022; Statistics Canada, 2021a). Of the Indigenous population, 180,085 identified as First Nations (62.1%), 97,865 as Métis (33.7%) and 1,720 (0.6%) as Inuit (Statistics Canada, 2021a) who reside across the Cariboo-Chilcotin Coast, Kootenay Rockies, Northern BC, Thompson Okanagan, Vancouver, Coast and

Mountains (VCM), and Vancouver Island regions. Notably, the Indigenous population grew by about 7.3%, which is nearly the same growth rate of the non-Indigenous population at 7.8% between 2016 and 2021. Based on the latest available data, the overall Indigenous population is younger than the non-Indigenous population, where the average age is 32.8 years compared to 42.4 years, respectively (Statistics Canada, 2016). Overall, the Indigenous population across Canada is projected to grow faster than the non-Indigenous population and is expected to reach between 2.5 and 3.2 million over the next 20 years due to higher fertility rates and changes in self-reporting on Indigenous identity (Statistics Canada, 2021b). While the well-being of this young and fast-growing population has improved over recent decades, it is still a pressing matter as the profound colonial histories in Canada still severely impacts the pace of improvement in the quality of life for Indigenous Peoples (OECD, 2019). Therefore, a better understanding of their own goals and needs is critical to supporting and designing effective policies suited to their circumstances.

The Indigenous Tourism Industry in British Columbia and Canada

From 2001 to 2019, the Canadian Indigenous tourism industry experienced rapid and unprecedented growth. During this period, the number of direct and indirect full-time tourism jobs increased from 13,000 to 39,000 and GDP rose from $596 million to $1.86 billion (ATAC, 2015, p. ix; Conference Board of Canada, 2019; ITAC, 2022). BC is an especially relevant destination as it is a highly popular location for Indigenous tourism and ranks second in Canada in terms of its number of businesses (Conference Board of Canada, 2019). In less than a decade, the Indigenous tourism industry has become increasingly recognized as one of BC's fastest growing sectors. Nearly 12% ($970 million) of BC's entire tourism GDP ($8.3 billion) came from the industry in 2018 (ISC, 2016; Thimm, 2019). Between 2003 and 2020, Indigenous tourism related businesses at various stages of development grew 170% from 181 businesses to 488 (ITBC, 2021). Additionally, the number of direct, full-time jobs rose by 669% from 962 jobs to 7,400 by 2018 (Destination BC, 2014; ITBC, 2020). Typical businesses identified across the province include accommodations (24%), retail-gas stations (19%), outdoor adventure (15%), retail (13%), and attractions (12%) (ITBC, 2021).

The industry is found to be outpacing the overall tourism activity in Canada as the demand for authentic Indigenous experiences continues to grow from international markets, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and China (ITAC, 2020; Destination Canada, 2021; BC Gov News, 2019). In BC, the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games raised domestic and international interest and consumer demand for authentic Indigenous cultural tourism experiences (ATBC, 2017). Research indicates that this growth stems from tourists seeking local and genuine Indigenous experiences that respect local protocols and practices as well as exhibit cultural and sustainable practices within their natural environment (Espinosa Abascal et al., 2015; Fletcher et al., 2016; Ramkissoon, 2015).

Actions like those described above demonstrate how tourists are becoming more conscious of how their spending can directly benefit individuals and communities who actively participate and control their own experiential content and activities (Chercoles et al., 2021; ITAC, 2017). As such, the industry is becoming an increasingly attractive option due to its potential social and economic benefits, such as employing and retaining youth, preserving Indigenous cultural heritage, allowing for direct involvement in the development of tourism products, and attaining education, knowledge and training, and financial stability through the establishment of businesses (Tides Canada, 2018; Kutzner & Wright, 2010; Graci, 2012; Graci et al, 2021). The rapid growth has centered Indigenous tourism as an important industry with potential to address outstanding social, economic and environmental problems and goals of Indigenous communities (ITBC, 2021).

Although numerous benefits are seen across the nation, nuances exist at the provincial and regional level. The BC Government notes that many Indigenous peoples, particularly First Nations communities, have developed tourism businesses to attract visitors (BC Government, 2022). Each region within the province is critically important as they are unique in tourism offerings that are based on diverse ecosystems, cultures, histories, and community lifestyles. Even so, participation in tourism varies widely across the provinces as the Indigenous population is distributed across urban, rural, small and medium population centres. For instance, Northern BC hosts the highest number of businesses (29%) followed by Vancouver Island (21%), VCM (19%), the Thompson Okanagan (15%), Cariboo Chilcotin Coast (10%) and the Kootenay Rockies (6%) (ITBC, 2021).

Figure 1. Map of British Columbia.

Source: British Columbia Destination Marketing Organization Association, 2023

Despite the industry's contributions to the overall tourism economy, it makes up a small proportion of BC and Canada's service exports and the experiences offered have distinct challenges compared to non-Indigenous tourism businesses (Thimm, 2019; Destination BC, 2014). These obstacles may be attributed to specific barriers affecting its growth potential, such as access to financing, training, marketing, poor accessibility to local communities, difficulties producing market-ready products, and insufficient educational opportunities on business and management techniques (ITAC, 2020; Lemelin et al., 2015; Thimm, 2019) as well as its heavy reliance on international visitators (Destination Canada, 2021; BC Gov News, 2019).

Notably, Indigenous tourism stakeholders are especially vulnerable to the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In accordance with travel restrictions, and health and safety measures, Indigenous businesses closed or operated with limited

financial and human capacity (BC Government News, 2022; ITAC, 2020; ITAC, 2022). Between, 2019 and 2020, tourism revenue fell by 64.9% from $20.3 billion to $7.1 billion **(**Government of British Columbia, 2022). Over the same timeframe, the Indigenous tourism industry endured a 12.3% increase in unemployment rate to 15.5% compared to 3.2% in 2019. COVID-19 has severely hit Indigenous communities more than non-Indigenous communities despite travel resuming in BC. Even with open, travel expenditures by BC residents, it is not sufficient to recuperate lost revenue from Canadian and international markets in which they depend on. This may be attributed to the lack of access to some rural areas, lower interest in participating in Indigenous cultural experiences and shifts in travel patterns due to the pandemic (ITBC,2021). Given the significance of the industry, the federal government, in partnership with Indigenous Tourism Canada (ITAC), is taking action to assist in the industry's recovery from the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, build the industry's resilience from future pandemics and other major disasters, and expand to include 40,000 workers (ITAC, 2022). While the obstacles of the Indigenous tourism industry faces are well-known amongst stakeholders, the degree to which they are fully considered in strategies is to be determined.

The Relationship Between the BC Government and the Indigenous Tourism Industry

BC has made strides towards building strong relationships with Indigenous Peoples which is guided by the federal government's *Canada's 2030 Agenda*. Since the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)* became BC legislation in 2019, the province became the first North American jurisdiction to release a five-year action plan dedicated to implementing the Declaration (BC Government, 2022). Not only does the action plan supplement existing initiatives, it provides an entire government, province-wide approach to achieving the objectives of the Declaration through a collaborative and consultative approach that is intended to implement the outlined actions. It tries to ensure that "Indigenous Peoples, communities and nations in BC are thriving and prospering as full participants in the social, cultural and economic landscape of the province" (BCIRR, 2022, p. 22).

As the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sports (MTACS) highlights, tourism is one area to advance the provisions by providing "investments to Indigenous Tourism

BC to support Indigenous tourism, Indigenous job creation, preservation of Indigenous languages, celebration of Indigenous cultures and the stewardship of territories, and to tell the stories of Indigenous Peoples in BC in their own words" (BCIRR, 2022, p. 27). This core priority extends to Indigenous tourism businesses, communities and associations to diversify visitor economies and bolster economic and socioeconomic prosperity, preserve culture, language and traditions. Notably, a number of regional and provincial tourism planning strategies and frameworks have been published to ensure the competitive and sustainable future of the sector, such as Destination BC's (DBC) *10-Year Destination Development Strategy* as well as the Province's *Strategic Framework for Tourism in British Columbia (2019-2021)* (Destination BC, 2022a; BC Government, 2019) which offer a blueprint to support destination development, growth and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic (Destination BC, 2022a; BC Government, 2019; Destination BC, 2022b). To support these initiatives, new provincial funding of $3.7 million was provided to ITBC to support and strengthen the recovery and growth in the industry to pre-pandemic levels of success by 2024. The funds are anticipated to generate capacity building, make tourism planning, training and mentoring services available, purchase new digital tools, and deliver training programs to develop marketable tourism products (BC Government News, 2022).

Despite the advancements described above in the industry, there is no research geared to understanding how these are upheld in terms of sustainable tourism development. Given the industry's importance in BC and Canada's economy, delving into its current landscape as a case study may help better understand the degree to which the strategies are serving the needs and concerns of Indigenous Peoples.

The Structure of the Tourism Sector

To analyze the different conceptualizations of sustainable tourism, it is necessary to identify the key stakeholders primarily involved in tourism policy and strategic planning frameworks. Markedly, the tourism sector in Canada is highly multifaceted and complex, as it involves numerous stakeholders across the federal government, provincial and territorial governments, regional governments, municipalities, tourism stakeholder organizations, and businesses from various economic sectors, which is not limited to transportation, infrastructure, hospitality and recreational trail management. Given the

complex nature of the industry, this thesis narrows the scope to a subset of actors that have major contributions to regional and provincial strategies.

Table 1. BC's key tourism stakeholders

Provincial	
Provincial Ministry	Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport
Provincial Destination Marketing Organization (DMO)	DBC
Industry Tourism Association*	ITBC
Regional	
Regional Destination Marketing Organizations (RDMO)*	- 4VI (Formerly Tourism Vancouver Island) - Cariboo Chilcotin Coast Tourism Association - DBC (Representing Vancouver, Coast & Mountains) - Kootenay Rockies Tourism - Northern BC Tourism - Thompson-Okanagan Tourism Association

Note: * Non-profit and stakeholder-based.

At the provincial level, organizational structures are shaped through statutory authorities for tourism marketing, government departments, corporatized governmental agencies and tourism organizations. Tourism governance in BC is guided by the *Tourism Act 1996* and related policies are administered by a range of government ministries (Tourism Act, 1996). The MTCAS is the leading provincial ministry of the tourism sector. Its position is to support the long-term development of the tourism sector by advancing products and sector development, employment creation and capacity building, and undertaking market research to provide policy direction and issues management (LinkBC, 2008; Williams & Sheppard, 2015). To do so, the Ministry is committed to working with communities, DMOs, industry, not-for-profit organizations and other levels of government to enhance business growth to generate and implement strategies to promote BC, work with partners and industry associations to resolve issues, coordinate investments, deliver programs that support provincial and regional priorities and issues, address objectives and challenges, and build strong relationships across the sector (Government of BC, 2015).

Other ministries across the BC government are responsible for policies and programs that directly affect tourism. These include the management of Crown land, culture and arts, parks and protected areas, transportation, heritage, recreation sites and

trails, and programs and policies that each have a direct or indirect effect on B.C.'s desirability as a travel destination and a place to operate a tourism business (Government of BC, 2015).

The Crown corporation, DBC, is mandated to coordinate the delivery of marketing campaigns and marketing-related programs for DMO partners (Destination BC, 2023). The market-driven organization is responsible for collaborating with tourism stakeholders across the province to coordinate tourism marketing at the international, provincial, regional and local levels. The DMO supports regional communities and Indigenous Peoples in developing or expanding tourism experiences, businesses and jobs by providing tourism marketing, support visitor centres, conduct tourism-related market research, and education and training (Destination BC, 2022b). It is responsible for executing components of the provincial government's tourism strategies (Destination BC, 2015).

In partnership and under contract with DBC, are six provincially appointed RDMOs: VCM, Vancouver Island, Thompson-Okanagan, Northern BC, Cariboo-Chilcotin, and Kootenay Rockies. These RDMOs work with tourism and community stakeholders within their respective geographical area to represent, promote and deliver relevant programs, collect and provide visitor statistics, as well as develop marketing and promotional opportunities for businesses (LinkBC, 2008; Williams & Shepherd, 2015; Gill & Williams, 2016). With exceptions, these specific DMOs tend to focus on marketing rather than broader destination planning, development, and management needs.

Provincial sector associations support the industry by representing the interests of, and advocate on behalf of, similar types of businesses working together to promote and enhance the attraction of their businesses. Oftentimes working to address provincial issues related to government legislation, business environments and land-use related to their sector and tourism as a whole. Tourism associations in Canada may exist as standalone entities or network and connect to join provincial or national umbrella organizations (McKercher, 2022). For Indigenous tourism development, governments and corporations have agreements, such as the *Indigenous Tourism Accord*, and are expected to provide support through programs and initiatives. These actions are typically communicated through networks, such as the ITBC to advance and promote Indigenous

destinations and experiences through the provision of training, resource dissemination, networking opportunities, and co-operative marketing programs to relevant businesses and communities (ITBC, 2021).

Conceptualization

In this thesis, Indigenous Peoples, also referred to as the “Aboriginal [P]eoples of Canada” in the Canadian Constitution Act 1982, include the Indian (including First Nation), Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada (the original peoples of North America and their descendants) (CIRNAC, 2021, Government of Canada, n.d.). Indigenous tourism must be “majority owned, operated and/or controlled by First Nations, Inuit or Métis Peoples that can demonstrate a connection and responsibility to the local Indigenous community and traditional territory where the operation resides” (ITAC, 2017, p. 4), as well as feature Indigenous culture as part of the attraction (Butler & Hinch, 2007).

Stakeholders can be defined as “entities which can and are making their actual stakes known (sometimes called ‘voice’), and, on the other end, by those which are or might be influenced by, or are or potentially influencers of, some organisation or another, whether or not this influence is perceived or known” (Starik, 1994, p. 90). Government ministries, Crown corporations, non-governmental organizations, specifically tourism organizations and associations, DMOs and businesses are key stakeholders who have the ability to generate and/or influence tourism policies and planning strategies (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020).

Tourism policy and strategic planning can be under-developed or developing destinations that require guidelines for further tourism development, or developed destinations that can revitalize their tourism sector and sustain its viability (Andriotis, 2011; Stylidis, 2018). Tourism policy is “whatever governments choose to do or not to do” (Dye, 1992, p. 2) based on what they believe is important and unimportant. These policies can be represented as “progressive course of actions, guidelines, directives, principles, and procedures set in an ethical framework that is issue-focused and best represents the intent of a community (or nation) to effectively meet its planning, development, product, service, marketing, and sustainability goals and objectives for the future growth of tourism” (Edgell et al., 2008, p. 7).

Furthermore, strategic planning sets and meets objectives for the future through a series of actions designed to realize either a single goal or a balance of interrelated goals (Yan & Morpeth, 2015) that anticipate and regulate change in local conditions and demands to promote structured development. These goals can relate to the social, economic, and environment dimensions which vary in importance based on the approach implemented, such as focusing on boosting tourist numbers without considering the carrying capacity of the destination, economic development to primarily generate jobs and income, or sustainability which intends to develop in consideration of the three sustainable dimensions (Andriotis & Stylidis, 2018).

Although the purpose of this study is to determine how non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples define sustainable tourism, I still reference United Nation's Environment Programme and UNWTO's (2005) definition of sustainable tourism as "development of tourism activities with a suitable balance between the dimensions of environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects to guarantee its long-term sustainability" as a general guide to look for specific elements in the concept (p. 11). I adopt this approach as sustainable tourism is a heavily contested topic where the three dimensions vary conceptually based on individual goals and realities (Saarinen et al., 2009; Strezov, Evans & Evans, 2017). To help differentiate the values into their respective dimensions, I reference Blancas et al. (2010), Lozano-Oyola et al. (2012), Torres-Delgado and Saarinen (2014), Asmelash and Kumar's (2019) previous studies on sustainable tourism indicators used to measure sustainability:

1. **Economic:** Number of tourist arrivals, average expenditures, peak month of visitation, number of accommodation establishments, tourism employment rate, employment growth in tourism, revenue growth, employment quality, and economic viability;

2. **Social:** seasonal tourism employment, public safety, transportation, amenities, such as health centres and facilities, ratio of tourists to locals, resident involvement in tourism industry, visitor satisfaction and attitude towards tourist destinations, community well-being, and cultural richness;

3. **Environmental:** waste volume, recycling, energy and renewable energy consumption, amount of erosion on the natural sites, frequency of environmental accidents, physical integrity, biological diversity, and resource-use efficiency.

Method of Data Collection

Considering that tourism policy and strategic planning documents are implemented by governmental institutions to provide direction at the sub-national level, I will only focus on regional and provincial stakeholders. Initially, I considered including the 162 municipalities, however, I excluded them from this analysis as municipalities generally focus on attracting meetings and conventions, and promoting festivals and events (OECD, 2020). I included ITBC as they represent and work closely with Indigenous tourism businesses to determine their needs and goals. Moreover, the association has greater contact with the regional organizations, Crown corporations, and the provincial government.

A purposive method of selection is used to compile a comprehensive list of published tourism policy and strategic planning documents released between 2016-2022. This time period is selected as it captures the dates in which the *2030 Agenda*, *Canada's 2030 Agenda*, and Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) *94 Calls to Action* were published. Many documents span over periods outside of the date selection criteria. For example, the Government of BC's 2012-2016 *Gaining the Edge: A Five-Year Strategy for Tourism in British Columbia* encompasses the years 2012-2015, though since it remains relevant to 2016, I kept the document for analysis. Given previous research on the Indigenous tourism literature, the term "Indigenous tourism" is the most commonly used phrase in reference to the industry (Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016; King, 2018; Butler, 2021). I exclude isolated words, such as "Indian" which would include irrelevant documents with citizens of India. Instead, I use the selected set of search strings and logical operators with the words: "Indigenous tourism", "Aboriginal tourism", "Indian band tourism", "tourism", "strategy", "strategic plan", "business plan", "community plan", "plan", "policy", "roadmap", "blueprint" along with location (regional names and the BC province) to target different geographical areas and levels of planning. Destinations that do not have or are in the process of developing a tourism plan at the time are excluded from further analysis. I included multiple versions of strategies, such as

updated documents. All documents are downloaded and filed into separate folders by year and locality.

Documents are further scrutinized by using Adobe Reader to ensure they consist of Indigenous tourism content in at least one section of the document or have at least three occurrences of the term in the text. All 26 documents gathered between March 1-15, 2023 met the selection criteria (*See Appendix*). Should ITBC not have reports published as they have working agreements with the MTCAS and Destination BC, the perspectives and opinions of BC's Indigenous stakeholders are assumed to be equally and accurately incorporated into the respective policies and strategic plans.

Method of Data Analysis

The data analysis consists of two phases. First, the cataloging of documents which include (1) the document title, (2) the publication date, (3) author(s), (4) Indigenous stakeholders present, (5) the percentage of Indigenous tourism content in the document (the number of pages with specific reference to Indigenous tourism in relation to all pages in the document), (6) whether the document is underpinned by the sustainable development paradigm and (7) the rationale or objectives for preparing the document. Second, I will identify the key descriptive characteristics of sustainability in relation to the Indigenous and broader tourism documents by identifying the text that resonates with the following questions and probes recorded in the table below.

Table 2. Format of analysis table

Name of policy/planning strategy			
Author(s)			
Location			
Indigenous Stakeholder			
Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4
Row 1	Probe/Question	Text	Comment
Row 2	What is the purpose of the document?		
Row 3	Is the sustainable tourism paradigm implicit?		

Row 4	What percentage of Indigenous tourism is covered?		
Row 5	What is environmental stability?		
Row 6	What is economic sustainability?		
Row 7	What is social sustainability?		
Row 8	What are other areas of sustainability?		
Row 9: Summary			
Row 10: Cumulative notes			

Table 2 uses columns and rows to summarize and collect specific quotes and sentences. For *Rows 5-8*, I apply a coding schema, which is understood to be "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña, 2009, pp. 3-4; Wong, 2008). Identifying themes through this approach "break[s] up the text into clearly defined clusters of themes" which allows 'the researcher is able to unravel the mass of textual data and make sense of others' sense-making, using more than intuition' (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 402). "This process helps determine the emerging or overlapping themes. Notably, this coding process is "primarily an interpretive act" which is meant to support the process between data collection and more extensive data analysis (Saldaña, 2009, pp. 3-4). I use *Column 4: Comment* to record notes to determine groupings of important emerging themes or concepts before combining the results together in *Row 11: Cumulative* notes. After this process, I cross-reference results to other tables to identify the frequency of similar and dissimilar themes among documents.

Although attempts are going to be made to ensure a comprehensive coverage, I acknowledge that the sample of documents may not be exhaustive and may not capture unpublished internal planning documents.

Chapter 3.

Review of the Literature

This study is concerned with Indigenous Peoples' conceptualizations of sustainable tourism and their representation in broader strategic policies and plans within the context of tourism development. The chapter draws upon works by Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and comprises a review of the relevant literature, beginning with a brief overview of Canada's colonial legacy and how the Canadian government is addressing the resulting systemic issues. Next, I review the industry's foundational principles along with the associated challenges to achieving them to provide context behind the growing popularity of sustainable tourism development. I then explore the different interpretations and critiques of sustainable development and sustainable tourism more broadly. Finally, I examine the literature on tourism policy and strategic planning with a particular focus on the involvement of Indigenous Peoples.

Colonialism and Reconciliation

Colonialism is an ongoing process by colonizers who "have rewritten histories, have created a legal system that justifies their rule, and have normalized a racist and unjust socio-economic system" through a set of policies and practices that continuously exploit and exert power over Indigenous communities (Alfred & Tomkins, 2010 cited in Youdelis, 2016, p. 1375). In Canada, the process of settling and assuming control over another nation's territories and imposing its own systems of laws and governance "erase[s] Indigenous economies, cultures, and political organization" for the sake of imposing economic exploitation, cultural superiority, and social hierarchy (Whyte, 2017, p. 8). Furthermore, the government's action in redacting its obligations to consult with Indigenous Peoples prior to making decisions has led to continuous severe distrust and resistance to government laws and regulations, policies and practices. The devastating process not only resulted in the separation from and loss of lands, resources, self-governance and self-determination but also in eroding the pride in cultural identity, language, family values and spirituality (Odulaja & Halseth, 2018). The consequences of these culminating issues produce persisting and disproportionately disadvantaged socio-economic circumstances, such as lower labour force participation, lower employment

rates, and lower income and wealth, which raises the level of economic dependency on funding sources and programs from governmental institutions (Burger, 2013; Alfred, 2009).

Canada's politics since the early 2010s focuses on reconciliation as a genuine response to repair the harms inflicted by its institutions and to move forward towards a future with harmonious co-existence between the Canadian government, settlers, and Indigenous Peoples and governments (McGregor, 2019; TRC, 2015a). Reconciliation is identified to be a central component to Indigenous Peoples' rights movements as it actively works towards restructuring and transforming relationships through dialogue, consultation and negotiation (TRC, 2015a; Hoicka, Savic & Campney, 2021). It is described as the "relationship among equals who will seek to establish bonds of trust and mutual respect by working to rectify the injustices of the past and who are committed to governing the terms of their coexistence in a spirit of reciprocity and mutual respect" (Murphy, 2008, p. 251).

Similarly, the TRC views reconciliation as "awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour" (TRC 2015, p. 113). The process of this relationship stems from seeking truth, justice, forgiveness, and healing while co-existing and cooperating over a shared goal of a better life for all. The reconciliation framework requires making amends for past wrongs that have harmed any possibility for establishing relationships as equals amongst actors, including forcing assimilation, imposing the residential school system to acculturate Indigenous Peoples into Canadian society, and displacing communities from traditional territories (TRC, 2015). Second, Indigenous Peoples, settlers and the state are equal actors in terms of shaping the negotiations and decision-making (Manning, 2020). Third, co-existence is based on a relationship of friendship and peace, where culture, traditions, languages and governance are practised without obstructing one another. Finally, actions should close "the gaps in social, health, and economic outcomes that exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians" to improve the lives of Indigenous Peoples (TRC 2015, p. 3). Albeit a slow process, the Canadian government has worked towards achieving these critical elements by endorsing the 94 actionable policy recommendations from the TRC's *Calls to Action* report in addition to enforcing the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)* into Canadian law.

There is a strong desire amongst Indigenous Peoples to build their communities on a culturally and traditionally grounded base, though there remains continuous struggle to have the rights to their land and resources recognized (Anderson, 2002 cited in Anderson, 2005). As such, Indigenous Peoples routinely advocate for "holistic social investments and a suitable land base to economically develop by using the language of investment and the extension of jurisdiction" but instead, settler governments tend to reframe this position solely as economic investment (Green, 2015, p. 474). As a result, one major critique of the government's response is that it heavily focuses on a practical strategy for reconciliation which seriously addresses economic disadvantages of equality rather than substantive issues of sovereignty or self-determination (Alfred, 2009; Corntassel, 2020; Craft & Blakley, 2022). Thus, reconciliation is often featured in numerous discussions regarding the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples, including policy programs and initiatives dedicated to improving the socio-economic circumstances of Indigenous Peoples (Wyile, 2017). Scholars argue that while Indigenous Peoples are gaining substantial agency in shaping decisions pertaining to economic development plans, this economically-focused rhetoric of reconciliation can be counter effective and misleading as it continues to normalize and perpetuate colonial control over and appropriation of Indigenous Peoples and their lands (Freeman, 2014; Youdelis, 2016). As a result, the Canadian government's approach is slated for appearing to perceive that "reconciliation entails Aboriginal peoples' accepting the reality and validity of Crown sovereignty and parliamentary supremacy in order to allow the government to get on with business" (Craft & Blakley, 2022, p. 261). While it may exhibit limitations, researchers and Indigenous communities reveal that it is a step towards achieving their own goals as they consider it as an opportunity to affirm their own sovereignty in partnership with Canada (Freeman, 2014). This is particularly significant as the Canadian government continues to increasingly work directly with Indigenous governments and communities as equal partners and beneficiaries in economic development plans (Salée & Lévesque, 2016).

While not the central focus of this study, the general overview of colonialism and reconciliation provides the necessary background to understanding the value and possible linkages presented by the elements of reconciliation to sustainable tourism development. Moreover, it demonstrates the motivation behind the Canadian government's approach to fulfilling its commitment to both Indigenous Peoples and the

wider sustainable development agenda. Notably, it is impossible to achieve either goal if this pervasive situation is not comprehensively addressed to overcome such long-lasting inequalities (OHCR, 2022).

Indigenous Tourism Development

Indigenous Peoples are not new to enterprise, and have been trading goods along established trade routes as well as internationally long before colonization and have continued to act as entrepreneurs ever since (McCarthy, 1939). Researchers contend that local Indigenous communities choose to embrace tourism when it is appropriately designed and managed to embody the perceived tangible and intangible benefits experienced by the community (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004; Lemelin et al., 2015; Paulauskaite et al., 2017; Vunibola et al., 2022). For businesses to remain sustainably operating over an extensive period of time, Indigenous Peoples are increasingly pursuing holistic approaches that must at least be comprised of five major principles: (1) environmental appreciation and conservation; (2) cultural exchange, understanding and preservation; (3) economic development and beneficiation; (4) community participation; and (5) empowerment of groups (Cobbinah, 2015; Chen, 2012; Blamey, 2001; Scheyvens et al., 2021). Both academics and tourism development practitioners consider each of these principles as foundational to shaping the quality and success of the industry as they tend to cover the interests and aspirations of the entire community as well as its individual members (Nielson & Wilson, 2012; Carr et al., 2016; UNWTO, 2019; Fuller et al., 2007; Higgins-Desbiolles, Trevorrow & Sparrow, 2014; Nikolakis & Nelson, 2015). Tourism ventures that incorporate these principles require careful planning and management to avoid or mitigate adverse effects that the involvement with tourism activity may have on the quality of life of Indigenous communities.

There is an immense assumption that participation in the industry will instantly be sustainable as businesses and operations tend to be small-scale and offerings relate to cultural values, traditions and lifestyles (Butler, 2021). It is certainly not easy to achieve all of the foundational principles, however, which can result in the instability of the industry. In reality, the industry is guided by numerous development plans and strategies centering on economic growth measured by the number and form of profits, job creation, economic diversity and income generation. These plans and strategies were mainly

controlled and promoted by external groups such as private corporations and governments which seldom led to long-lasting prosperity for the communities (Colton & Whitney-Squire, 2010; Eversole, 2003). For instance, several studies demonstrate that although a number of benefits do arise, negative impacts can lead to complications for the livelihoods of Indigenous peoples, especially in their territories. Concerns include overcapacity, lifestyle disruptions, potential cultural clashes due to different value systems, invasion of privacy, enormous pollution, deterioration of ecosystems and biodiversity, overconsumption of natural resources to improve the quantity and standard of tourism activities, inconsistent profits, and uneven participation and decision-making on the extent and types of activities (Andriotis & Stylidis, 2018; Yi-Fong, 2012; Barman et al., 2015; Cabral & Dhar, 2020; Fuller, Buultjens & Cummings, 2005; Gezon, 2014; Sharma et al., 2020; UNWTO, 2019). Rather than enhance quality of life, these issues can exacerbate existing inequalities and inequities accommodating for and ensuring access to resources and opportunities to succeed in the tourism sector (Jamal & Dredge, 2014).

Geographical location plays a significant role for tourism experiences and activities. Rural and remote areas are typically known to have scenic natural environments with unique wildlife, vegetation, and Indigenous cultures. These characteristics are attractive to numerous visitors; however, these areas face extensive problems related to access, investment and marketing (Pabel et al., 2017). Barriers to the ongoing success of ventures include limited opportunities to form partnerships with other tour operators as well as limited participation in appropriate training (Coria & Calfucura, 2012). Because Indigenous experiences and activities are oftentimes located in rural and remote areas, they tend to not be given the same degree of opportunities or access to resources or infrastructure to fully develop or promote their businesses.

As seen in the Torres Strait Islands of Australia, there are chances to utilize the industry to leverage the expansion of access through infrastructure. But the general lack of support and expenses to funding leaves a variety of tourists unable to access cost-effective transportation options (Ruhanen & Whitford, 2014). For example, Ruhanen, Whitford & McLennan's (2013) research on Indigenous tourism in Australia discovered that there was an issue with product awareness and promotion. Overall, 20% of visitors had low awareness of Indigenous tourism products, 12% had low preference and a mere 2% had intention to undertake Indigenous tourism experiences. Indigenous tourism

operators indicated that low participation in relation to the domestic market was due to ‘racism/negative preconceptions’ and ‘negative media attention’ (Ruhanen et al., 2013).

Ruhanen et al. (2013) also found that a lack of promotional material appeared to be one cause for the low level of participation in Indigenous tourism experiences. A study by Ryan and Huyton (2002) on tourists visiting central Australia found that attractions with a focus on Australian Aboriginal culture were perceived to be less popular than previously thought. In relation to the international market, Buultjens and White (2008) found that the majority of international visitors (between 60% and 80%), although interested in and having previously participated in an Indigenous tourism activity, reported having seen very little advertising. Pabel et al.’s (2017) research in the Wet Tropics region of Australia showed that as a travel motive, Indigenous tourism experiences were not considered a top priority by respondents visiting the region and it was not considered a major motivating factor to travel to the region This issue reduces the tourism market to a niche group that is financially capable of experiencing these natural assets or culture while excluding others who may demonstrate some interest in the offerings. Since these areas tend to have strong extractive natural resource-based economies and are in remote areas, tourism is often depicted as a minor industry that contributes little to local or regional economies (Schmallegger & Carson, 2010). As a result, there is less focus and financial and marketing support, even for world renowned destinations, such as the Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve in BC (Thomlinson & Crouch, 2012 cited in Lemelin et al., 2015).

Defining Sustainable Development and Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable development was first defined by the Brundtland Commission as “meet[ing] the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet with their own needs.” (WCED, 1987, p. 12). With its adoption by the tourism sector, this concept was later defined specifically by the UNWTO as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities” (UN, n.d., n.p.). The definition suggests that a long-term, holistic approach that continuously evolves as community contexts shift (Eddins & Cottrell, 2013) is critical to addressing the necessary requirements to sustain and improve the welfare and livelihoods of host communities. The process would typically focus on the protection and

equitable use of the world's resources in a way that allows benefits to be obtained while pursuing tourism as an economic strategy.

The local-focus perspective is not a foreign approach amongst academics and professionals. Yet, it is gaining interest from tourism organizations, international organizations, public sector agencies, and private sector entities who are now shifting towards applying sustainability-driven concepts in their policy statements and initiatives. Their goal is to reduce adverse impacts and enhance the well-being of tourism destinations and local communities (Bramwell & Lane, 1993; Edgell, 2015). While the general understanding of sustainability may satisfy certain actors, it is subjected to constant debate and criticism. This is due to its broad conceptual definition as determining the appropriate path for sustainable tourism is certainly not easy to operationalize in a manner that effectively suits the realities of communities (Bramwell et al., 2017; Edgell, 2015; Ruhanen & Whitford, 2019; Wall, 2007). Sustainable development requires tourism to co-exist with other activities and achieve a balance between the human (social, cultural, and moral) environment, the physical environment and human activities (Butler, 1999). As a multidisciplinary field of study, numerous perspectives have been proposed, which has led to constant disagreement over the different aspects of sustainability, and how best to adapt it for practical use in tourism development (Butler, 2015; Saarinen, 2018; Sharpley, 2009; Sharpley, 2020). For example, Dodds & Graci (2010) claim that over 200 definitions exist, which suggests that a unanimous definition has been difficult to achieve given the ongoing debate surrounding the concept.

The notion of sustainable development is far from being equally beneficial to everyone in society, as it is considered as a calculated method by Western perspectives to transition from colonialism to globalization (Muliro, 2015). In fact, Yuval-Davis (2006) argues that it is often classified as hegemonic discourse where "identity politics…render invisible experiences of the more marginal members […] and construct a homogenized 'right way' to be its member" (p. 195). In other words, those in privileged political positions determine what constitutes a good balance of environmental, economic and social factors, whereas this may not suit the context in which it is applied but rather raises the stigmatization of certain minority groups. This issue clearly demonstrates that the notion of sustainable development may not be as inclusive as one might expect. Despite its well intentions, one key issue that remains is that the nature of sustainability

tends to pave the way towards unbridled growth with less consideration for the environmental and social dimensions. Thus, maximizing benefits from tourism while minimizing development costs is deemed sustainable (Xu & Sofield, 2016). Sacrifices, including habitat loss and environmental degradation will be experienced by certain groups in the long term. These sacrifices indicate that the concept and practice may fail to alleviate the strains across the three sustainable dimensions but also undermine the complex nature of local communities. As a result, the sustainable development paradigm is often viewed as hypocritical as the term has been flaunted around to exploit the natural environment while continuously imposing colonial practices on local populations (Muliro, 2015).

Taking the pre-existing social structure as the starting point, therefore, disregards the social inclusivity of local communities as co-producers and participants of the environment. Not only do they have a distinct conceptualization; they are required to co-exist with Western ideals while considering alternative options to the already finite resources on which they depend. In the central Amazon, Guillermo Ñaco, an Asheninka leader argues that “all development should not pollute the environment or be destructive, otherwise it is not development. What I see is a policy of hypocrisy of the western culture, of capitalism, when it mentions the necessity to preserve nature, to work in a sustainable manner. But in practical terms it is destroying her and polluting her” (Conversational interview 2012, Ucayali-Peru cited in Vásquez-Fernández & Ahenakew pii tai poo taa, 2020).

For Amazonian Indigenous Peoples, such as the Asheninka, the interconnected relationship with their natural surroundings is engrained in their histories and practices and provides power and knowledge sharing. Thus, diverging perspectives on the function of the Amazon and its representation has led to numerous clashes between the nation-state and Indigenous Peoples (Vásquez-Fernández & Ahenakew pii tai poo taa, 2020; Mignolo, 2018). This conflict demonstrates that the construct of sustainable development remains centered on extractions that disrespect Indigenous Peoples’ culture and intentions with the use of the land. Within tourism, the interest in sustainable development tends to contradict the core objective, which is to sell both the physical and human environment. Continuity of the products is a major concern of the industry. As seen with diverging perspectives, if the issues and needs are improperly understood, articulated and examined, sustainable development cannot extend beyond the one-

dimensional focus on the processes of economic growth (Murphy & Price, 2012; Peters, 2015).

Tourism Policy and Strategic Planning for Sustainable Tourism

Policy-making for tourism is highly complex as the sector consists of a multitude of political, economic, and social factors typified by numerous actors (Xu & Sofield, 2016) that prompts diverse values and interests. The objective of tourism policy and planning is to influence how tourism develops and, consequently, how benefits and impacts are distributed amongst stakeholders (Dredge & Jenkins, 2007; Hall & Jenkins, 2004) to improve the lives of local communities, regions, and nations (Biederman et al., 2007; Hall & Gage, 2002). Tourism policies focus on the actions implemented by governmental institutions which have significant effects on the direction of tourism development on local communities and the broader industry for several years at a time (Wanner et al., 2020). Devices used to deliver are recognized as laws, decrees or plans, some of which can be more akin to strategies that relate to regulations and rules that influence suppliers and consumers, and controls and promotes tourism products or experiences (Connell, Page & Bentley, 2009; Tribe & Paddison, 2023).

Researchers have explored policy and strategic planning documents to better understand how the concept of sustainable development has been applied (Connell et al., 2009; Ruhanen, 2008; Ruhanen, Moyle et. al., 2014; Torres-Delgado & Palomegue, 2012; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2010). The literature suggests that public and private sectors of the tourism industry have been attempting to achieve sustainable tourism through government policies though they have not always been successful in achieving a balance between the economic, environmental, and social sustainability dimensions (Kozak & Baloglu, 2010). For example, a global analysis of national tourism strategies across 17 nations between 2015-2021 revealed that the strategies primarily addressed business and economic needs, such as gross domestic product growth, tourist arrivals, product development, employment, infrastructure, marketing, market research, competition, investment and transport above all other interests (Tribe & Paddison, 2023).

Another example, a study on tourism development policies in China, discovered that the concept of sustainable tourism development is oftentimes ambiguous and

infrequently integrates ideals of sustainable tourism. Instead, the foci of the policies remain growth-oriented based on the industry's commercial viability as an economic and business activity (Xu & Sofield, 2016). This skewed alignment contradicts sustainable development goals in favor of growth, competitiveness and profit-making which drive the continual expansion of economic gains.

Policies can more or less be limited in coordination across government, non-governmental organizations, and industry actors. Thus, indicating that the objectives or actions outlined assume a consensus on the shared tourism interests and favoured outcomes, though, realistically, this is nearly impossible to achieve (Massardier, 2003; Blackstock, 2005). This situation opens the doors for a number of difficulties. For instance, disagreement over tourism objectives can lead to a large number of additional supportive and influential policy documents from various actors. Conflicting views can cause delays in implementing actions or measures, especially when coordination is poor (Wanner et al., 2020).

Another example relates to top-down approaches to policies that portray Indigenous groups as subjects of concern instead of being included as active parties that can provide insight to their own solutions. As a result, these forms of policies are less driven by and guided by Indigenous Peoples despite having extensive knowledge of their own goals and expectations (Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016; Scheyvens et al., 2021). For example, Kilpisjärvi, a Finnish village located in the Indigenous Sámi region, is not considered to be a Sámi village by various groups of people (Tuulentie, 2017). Stakeholders and interested parties range from researchers, authorities, tourists, and decision-makers who market and develop plans specific to hiking and safari tourism in the area. These stakeholders dismiss Sámi culture, recreation, nature conservation, and reindeer herding. In doing so, it has resulted in conflicts around the lack of cultural understanding in tourism business and development decisions. As such, tourism industry representatives and policy-makers simplistically consider sustainable tourism as the maintenance of its economic viability without consideration of the sustainability of other socio-cultural and environmental activities or processes.

When imposed from above, the sustainable development approach heavily disregards the complexity of the local cultural identities and institutions. It also ignores the environmental, social, economic, and political constraints and factors that impact

Indigenous Peoples' livelihoods (Fletcher et al., 2016; Whitford et al., 2001; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2010; Simonsen, 2006). These include behaviors, practices, and values in understanding and responding to environmental changes (Budeanu et al., 2016). Moreover, many decisions over economic development, including tourism, have been made as a response to external developments that have occurred outside of their local area and outside the control of the communities affected (Butler, 2021). Whether to participate or not comes from realizing that development of some form is likely to occur anyway. Thus, researchers advocate for community bottom-up planning (Sakata & Prideaux, 2013). Full participation and involvement of Indigenous Peoples is critical to its success, especially in terms of formulating appropriate policy, planning and measurement to determine feasibilities of projects and outcomes (Twining-Ward & Butler, 2002).

Chapter 4.

Research Findings and Discussion

This chapter analyses and interprets the tourism policy and strategic planning document results by first briefly summarizing its content, the involvement of Indigenous stakeholders, and the inclusion of Indigenous tourism within the broader scope of the tourism industry. Next, I delve into the number of occurrences and the basis for incorporating the sustainable tourism paradigm. I further investigate the underlying themes of sustainable tourism and their relations to the existing academic literature. The themes include Indigenous tourism as a niche product and experience that would meet broader industry goals of economic growth; the omission and slow transition in considering environmental protection and conservation; and relationship building with Indigenous tourism stakeholders. In each of these themes, I will address overlapping critical barriers that are impeding sustainable tourism.

The Format of the Tourism Policy and Strategic Planning Documents

The provincial strategies outline key priorities and concrete actions to be embedded across the region's short-term and long-term decision-making and tourism planning. In addition, the strategies aim to better align and reduce overlap in industry marketing and destination development efforts. The intention is to ensure that BC is the most recommended tourism destination in North America and to enhance government and private sector return-on-investment in terms of tourism assets (Destination BC, 2017a). As such, the strategies have direct influence over the DMOs, regional and industry planning.

Both ITBC and the regional *10-Year Destination Development Strategies (DDS)* provide a roadmap to support provincial priorities in addition to providing context specific opportunities and impediments to tourism growth and development. Part of the objectives is to garner support and leverage existing and new partnerships surrounding current and future key tourism assets (Destination BC, 2018; ITBC, 2021). In doing so, they provide strategic direction and guidance at the regional and industry level for local

and regional planning (Destination BC, 2017a; ITBC, 2019; ITBC, 2021) which would strengthen and improve collaboration efforts between local, local, regional and provincial agencies, First Nations, DMOs, tourism operators and other interest groups to improve communities' attractiveness as destinations, clarify priorities to community leaders and better align development and marketing efforts. (Government of BC, 2015, p. 17). The results are an integrated system of priorities that will achieve greater development decisions, drive greater tourism revenues, and realize benefits for businesses and communities. However, while the regional DDS delves into the specific and nuanced actions that can be taken that would benefit both First Nations, Indigenous businesses, communities, and organizations alongside non-Indigenous entities, it is limited by the lack of endorsement from these communities and are mere potential actions that can be supported by government. This may lead to potential key initiatives that address persisting issues experienced by the industry to take precedent over other actions that would benefit Indigenous tourism stakeholders.

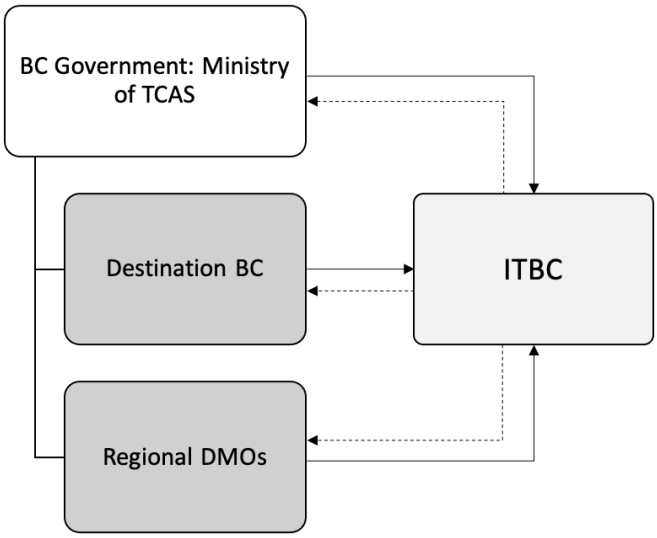

Figure 2. A simplified relationship of BC's tourism b odies examined in this study.

Note: The figure demonstrates the direct influence the provincial government and DMOs have in marketing and developing the province's tourism economy. The figure shows the organizations' relationship with the ITBC in terms of the tourism strategic policy and planning frameworks.

Overall, the association, regional and provincial tourism policy and strategic planning documents are comprised of the major components:

1. Summarizing the tourism industry landscape, which entails geographical locations, cultural groups, and common, popular and emerging tourism attractions and experiences.

2. Presenting the mission and vision statements that highlight priorities for current and future years which generally pertain to enhancing the Indigenous tourism and overall industry's competitiveness across the province.

3. Outlining the destination development goals by identifying key challenges and areas for improvement, such as seasonal variation, accommodation shortages, growing the number of purchasable products, guided experiences and self-discovery activities by researching target markets to increase awareness and interest in the province as a travel destination.

4. Stating the actionable targets to facilitate tourism development, including the necessary tools to support policy development, regulation and marketing, financial support, human capacity building, infrastructure development, and fostering partnerships.

Participation of Indigenous Tourism Stakeholders

The ITBC and other Indigenous tourism stakeholders were contributors to the 26 Destination BC and BC government-led strategies to some degree. Yet, the details on the engagement process and extent are minimal.

Overall, ITBC representatives were part of three of four provincial strategies. They were acknowledged to have "provided input [along with] more than 1,300 individual businesses through an industry survey" or "through the destination development planning process" (Government of BC, 2012, p. 5; Government of BC, 2019, p. 30). These stakeholders typically fell under one or more of the three categories:

1. Participants in community meetings, surveys, and interviews;

2. Sources for relevant documents for reports and strategies; and/or

3. Contributors in working groups (WG) or steering committee (SC) that helped prioritize strategic initiatives and develop actionable items for each development goal.

Table 3. The number of Indigenous representatives in the provincial strategies' WGs between 2012-2024

Region	Number of Documents	ITBC Representation	Other Indigenous Representation
Province	4	3	Unclear

ITBC representatives only had direct participation in six of 22 regional strategies. Notably, various Indigenous tourism operators and First Nations from but not limited to the Shisahlh Nation, Saulteau First Nation, Splatsin First Nation, and Westbank First Nation were involved at the WG level in 10 strategies, while the remaining 12 documents had no Indigenous representative. While not at the WG level, one ITBC and other Indigenous tourism stakeholders, such as from the Xwisten Indian Band and Siska First Nation provided feedback on trail access, building and maintenance as members of the Trail Management Committees. It is essential to note that the strategies provide a list of critical Indigenous tourism stakeholders and First Nations that should be involved in achieving the goals of the regional tourism planning and development process moving forward.

Table 4. The number of Indigenous representatives in the regional DDS' WGs and Trail Management Committees between 2017-2019

Region	Number of Documents	ITBC Representative	Other Indigenous Representative
Cariboo Chilcotin	1	0	2
Kootenays	5	1	2
Northern BC	2	1	7
Thompson Okanagan	4	0	4
VCM	4	1	1
Vancouver Island	3	2	0
Multiple*	3	1	2

Note: Multiple refers to strategies that span across two or more regions.

Inclusion of Indigenous Tourism

All strategies described Indigenous tourism as an important and motivating industry while highlighting various examples of Indigenous tourism businesses

throughout the province. Each strategy emphasized the dedication towards fostering strong relationships with Indigenous Peoples to sustain and grow the industry, which will be discussed further in the later sections of this report. The Indigenous tourism industry is commonly described as a leader in this niche sector domestically and internationally with further growth opportunities.

Between 2012-2018, the inclusion of Indigenous tourism content averaged around 26% in the provincial strategies but increased by 35% from 2019-2024 to 61%. The latter documents were published after the TRC's *94 Calls to Action* in 2015, *Canada's 2030 Agenda* in 2019 and adoption of the *Declaration on the Rights of Peoples Act* into BC's law in 2019.

Table 5. The percentage of Indigenous tourism content in provincial strategies between 2012-2024 based on page numbers

Region	Number of Documents	Average Percent Coverage (%)
Provincial	4	44

Between 2017-2018, Indigenous tourism content averaged around 21% and increased to 33% in 2019 for the regional strategies.

Table 6. The percentage of Indigenous tourism content in regional DDS' between 2017-2019 Based on Page Numbers

Region	Number of Documents	Average Percent Coverage (%)
Cariboo Chilcotin	1	20
Kootenays	5	15
Northern BC	2	37
Thompson Okanagan	4	22
VCM	4	32
Vancouver Island	3	12
Multiple*	3	32

Note: Multiple refers to strategies that span across two or more regions.

The Concept of Sustainable Tourism in Indigenous and non-Indigenous-Led Strategic Tourism Policies and Planning Documents

All tourism policies and strategic planning documents address sustainable tourism in some capacity. Across the Indigenous-led and non-Indigenous-led

documents, the frequency in which the terms were mentioned remained relatively the same between 2012 and 2024. In particular, the number of references minimally increased following the adoption of the UN *2030 Agenda* in 2015, establishment of Canada's *2030 Agenda* in 2019 as well as during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Table 7. Sustainability referenced in ITBC's documents between 2016-2023

Region	Number of Documents	References	Percent Coverage (%)
Provincial	3	30	0.12

Table 8. Sustainability in Provincial Strategies between 2012-2024

Region	Number of Documents	References	Percent Coverage (%)
Provincial	4	74	0.31

Table 9. Sustainability referenced in regional DDS' between 2017-2019

Region	Number of Documents	References	Percent Coverage (%)
Cariboo Chilcotin	1	21	0.14
Kootenays	5	198	0.15
Northern BC	2	60	0.08
Thompson Okanagan	4	185	0.29
VCM	4	128	0.19
Vancouver Island	3	94	0.17
Multiple*	3	98	0.12

Note: Multiple refers to strategies that span across two or more regions.

It is critical to note that based on the TRC's *94 Calls to Action*, the process of reconciliation includes, but is not limited to the adoption and implementation of UNDRIP as a framework for reconciliation with strategies and measures to achieve the goals outlined in the declaration (TRC, 2015). Tourism offers a space to help commit and address unresolved issues concerning colonial legacies (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2003). As ITBC (2021) notes, the sector can be a vehicle to achieving reconciliation by supporting key actions not limited to: (1) preserving and promoting the living culture and rich heritage of Indigenous peoples through tourism as Indigenous Peoples see fit; (2) assisting Indigenous communities and tourism businesses to gain the appropriate skills in developing tourism experiences and financial assistance for businesses, organizations and industry alike; and (3) establishing partnerships between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous actors to advance the competitiveness of the industry. Sustainable

tourism cannot be achieved without reconciliatory efforts that support the principle of self-determination, which allows Indigenous Peoples to freely pursue and benefit from their own economic, social, and cultural development.

In relation to the strategic policy and planning frameworks, sustainable tourism is often referenced in the mission and objectives in the strategies to set the direction or formulation of tourism policy, either as a principle or target. Generally, the concept is depicted as a way to retain high satisfaction from tourists' needs and assure significant visitor products and experiences. It is here, that the consciousness on the priorities and issues of sustainability are raised, which leads to propagating practices for sustainability. The significance is that the sustainable tourism sector development ambitions are through the lens of strengthening its competitiveness.

Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous-led strategies reveal that tourism is continuously evolving by cycling through stages of "development, stagnation, decline, and rejuvenation" (Destination BC, 2019a, p. 10). As a commodity, each destination is required to vigilantly modernize and improve based on changing visitor demographics and to remain competitive against similar destinations globally. The formula for destination development demonstrates a feedback loop where the health and quality of environmental, social, economic, and cultural characteristics of a destination are vitally linked to visitor demand and supply. A destination is therefore attractive based on features of visitor experiences, the natural environment, infrastructure and amenities available, industry support. Investments into these key areas allow local communities to simultaneously share and benefit from new and improved social, economic and environmental infrastructure and resources which would result in sustainable communities and tourism industry. This way of thinking considers the intentions towards ensuring that benefits of the industry are shared with all local residents (Government of BC, 2019; Destination BC, 2019a, Destination BC, 2017).

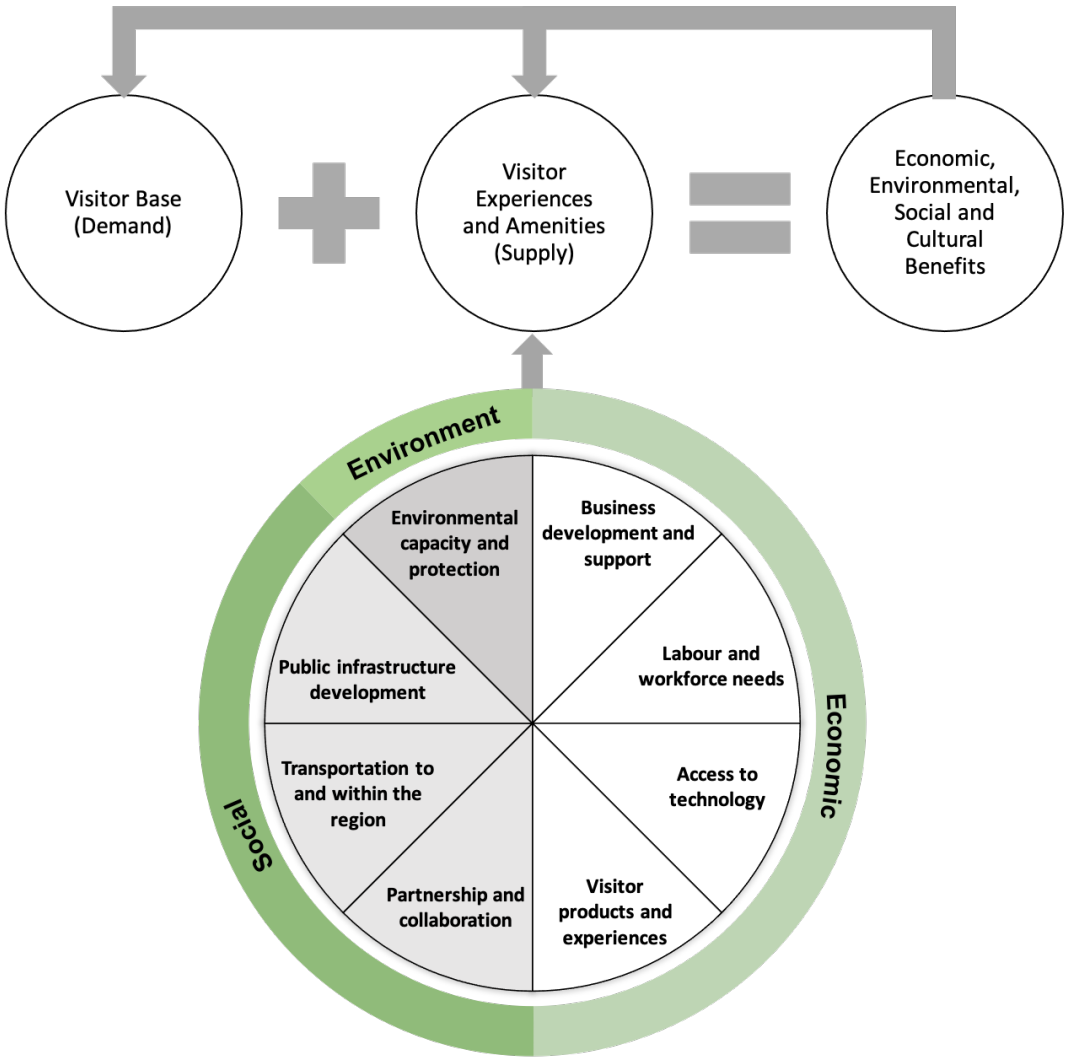

Figure 3. The formula for sustainability in the overall tourism sector.

Note: The figure shows the economic, environment and social factors identified by Indigenous and non-Indigenous-led strategies contributing to sustainable tourism.

Even though all the strategies reveal linkages to the notion of sustainable tourism, interpreting the meaning itself from the text revealed to be difficult due to its ambiguity and highly intertwined nature between the sustainable dimensions. Prior to 2019, the provincial documents did not address the concept of sustainable tourism directly, whereas ITBC and 17 regional DDS began delving into the concept around 2017. In cases where sustainable tourism was not cited as an individual concept, it was typically found through terms such as “sustainability” or “sustainable”. For example, one goal outlined in BC’s *Gaining the Edge Tourism Strategy 2015-2018* is “enhancing

competitiveness and sustainability" to ensure that BC's tourism industry remains highly attractive in a globally competitive market (Government of BC, 2015, p. 13). Sustainability was not clearly defined, but rather rooted in measurable outcomes, such as revenue growth. In contrast, BC's *Tourism Strategic Framework 2019-2021* as well as VCM and Metro Vancouver's regional DDS explicitly cite the UNWTO's definition that "tourism that takes full account of the current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities" (Government of BC, 2019; Destination BC, 2019a; Destination BC, 2017a). The reference serves as the basis to guide the longevity and maintenance of the industry.

The dynamic nature of the tourism industry in BC reveals that appropriately planning and developing tourism purposefully and sustainably requires balancing and compromising between society's economic, environmental and social characteristics. While I categorize the ideas of sustainable tourism into the three dimensions since they lean towards the conceptualizations in the academic literature, it is important to note that these dimensions cannot entirely be examined as individual components due to its overlapping nature. Since sustainable tourism tends to be heavily described implicitly, this required establishing recurring patterns properly to determine the underlying themes. The overall themes found between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous-led strategies fall under three categories: (1) social well-being and reconciliation; (2) economic growth by prioritizing visitor interests through market research, and business and job development; and (3) preserving the natural environment.

Prioritizing Economic Growth by Meeting Visitor Expectations and Needs, Business Development, Employment, and Revenue Growth

Throughout all the strategies examined, economic sustainability is valued the most compared to the other sustainability dimensions. Sustainable tourism is closely linked with competitiveness. As a result, tourism businesses must apply strategies in all areas of business operations and services to ensure its survival (Madhavan & Rastogi, 2013; Streimikiene et al., 2021). According to ITBC, annual growth in the number of visitors, visitor spending, number of market-ready and export-ready Indigenous-owned products and experiences are critical to the sustainability of the industry. Now given the

impacts of COVID-19 pandemic, "91% of the Indigenous Tourism BC Stakeholder's have had to close or operate in a limited capacity, [and] 74% of businesses have had to lay off employees" (ITBC, 2021, p. 5). As a result, the identified areas for growth are essential to business and industry survival as “it has taken over 20 years to build the Indigenous tourism industry within BC and achieve over 400 Indigenous tourism businesses (ITBC, 2021, p. 9).

Achieving the goals of revenue, employment and business growth by meeting and exceeding visitor expectations is comprised of five components: (1) marketing and market research; (2) transitioning businesses to market-ready and export-ready statuses; (3) providing jobs and skills training; (4) ensuring access to recent digital technologies; and (5) increasing transportation and infrastructure across the province.

Indigenous tourism is portrayed as one defining feature of BC’s tourism brand and is often described as vital to the provincial economy as it is becoming the fastest growing tourism industry (Government of BC, 2015). From a market perspective, it is viewed as having great potential in achieving sustainability as it offers the “most significant short-term and long-term visitor volume potential” due to its product offers and experiences (Government of BC, 2015, p. 4). To continue with this momentum, BC states that it is positioned to “satisfy the increasing demand for high quality, authentic experiences” which is relayed to boost the province’s competitive advantage and to resonate with potential visitors worldwide (Government of BC, 2012, p. 7). Approaches to ensuring the industry’s long-term sustainability pertains to meeting visitor expectations and needs through catered Indigenous tourism products and experiences determined by market research and strategic marketing over multiple years to appeal to a broad visitor base. As a result, this process highly focuses on the perspective of tourists’ interests and demands, indicating that quality assurance is an ongoing process and a fundamental priority. Similar to a previous study on Aboriginal tourism in Australia, operators expressed commitment to continual improvements in their business, and are responsive to customers’ needs, feedback and market trends (Akbar & Hallak, 2019). There is a process of trial and error to continue to refine products based on consumer reactions, especially in the early stages of development. Lack of action risks losing competitiveness to other destinations with similar products, services and experiences, including Australia and New Zealand (Government of BC, 2019). As such there is a need to compete against other popular travel destinations and maintain sustainable growth in

the number of international visitors while continuing to build the domestic traveller market (Government of BC, 2019).

The entire list of strategies prioritizes the need to support communities and entrepreneurs by investing in and developing new and enhancing existing products and experiences to motivate visits. Ideally, market research in high potential markets would provide opportunities for tourism businesses to effectively respond to evolving consumer preferences, shifting demographics, major economics by re-assessing existing and development new tourism offerings (Government of BC, 2012; Destination BC, 2018a). Although BC Government does not delve into potential products or experiences, ITBC and the regional strategies are encouraging for the integration of Indigenous tourism themes, products and partners in promotional material that is cognizant of culture, traditions and heritage (ITBC, 2021; Destination BC, 2017d, 2017e, 2017f, 2017g, 2018, 2018a, 2019, 2019a). Promotional material would include product packaging to connect Indigenous experiences with other visitor experiences, such as river-based, mountain-based, and culinary experiences (Destination BC, 2017a). This process involves identifying opportunities to develop and work with Indigenous entrepreneurs and communities to add nature-based, water-based, cultural and heritage products and experiences which will help elevate Indigenous voices and presence in the overall visitor experience throughout the destination (Destination BC, 2017a).

All strategies indicate a need to provide tools, program funding, training and educational resources to increase the number of market-ready and export-ready businesses (Government of British Columbia, 2012). The right environmental conditions in place relates to fostering positive work environments to allow the industry prosper. The regional strategies state that a “positive operating environment” through government support for tourism development and management is necessary to produce a robust and coordinated industry (Destination BC, 2019b, p. 32). Instead of providing broad general goals, certain regions, like Northeastern BC proactively describes the way to support First Nations. For instance, connecting with First Nations will determine the levels of interest in developing authentic experiences but also to provide economic support, capacity building and/or education, research and guidance to communities and entrepreneurs to enhance existing business or starting a new business (Destination BC, 2019b, p. 48). Similarly, Metro Vancouver indicates that with 11 First Nations, there are specific community visions, existing tourism developments, tourism businesses, and/or

tourism aspirations to be supported but the area is home to relatively few businesses (Destination BC, 2017a). This closely corresponds with Butler's (1999) contention that sustainable tourism can only be achieved if businesses are commercially viable. Though in instances where businesses are marginally viable, operators may adopt practices to ensure that businesses survive by looking at ways to reduce costs or to re-allocate resources to generate income or to find ways to balance economic, environmental, and social/cultural objectives or even sacrifice some profitability (Moeller, Dolnicar, & Leisch, 2011). Like ITBC's suggestion, there is a strong need to build more success-friendly business environments that include increasing efforts to support entrepreneurs in developing and investing in visitor attractions as well as provide training to develop skills, identify readiness requirements and facilitate understanding with tourism operators, and workshops on required actions to improve business readiness, provide one-on-one mentor, and leverage tourism industry and government programs to increase the number of market ready and export ready businesses.

Aside from business development, a sustainable labour market requires adequate investments to address challenges associated with labour shortages, gaps in skillsets, regional dispersion of the workforce and year-round staff constraints. It is widely recognized that investments must be made in secondary and post-secondary courses for human resource, training, and education program delivery. Additionally, recruiting and retaining staff is highly related to developing opportunities for job growth and developing requisite skills necessary for business success (ITBC, 2022; Government of BC, 2012, 2015, 2019; Destination BC, 2017b, 2019).

Challenges associated with tourism development is access to rapidly advancing technologies, such as digital platforms and computer systems ITBC, 2017, 2021; Government of BC, 2019, 2021; Destination BC). Greater financial support is necessary for operators to integrate technology into all aspects of their operations, such as creating greater convenience and ways to engage with visitors during the complete research, purchase, and trip cycle. There is also a consensus across the sector to enhance public infrastructure and amenities including transportation systems to allow tourism activities to be accessible and inclusive for everyone (Government of BC, 2012, 2015, 2019). Part of this formula is to streamline visitor connectivity and movement digitally and physically.

Enhancing Quality of Life through Indigenous Tourism

Social sustainability tends to be depicted as the needs, rights and well-being of people. It is achieved through various venues such as access to resources and information, and decision-making (Boström, 2012). Essential to this discussion relates to the need for Indigenous tourism development, such as cultural products and experiences to originate from Indigenous communities (Destination BC, 2017b, 2017c). Given the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, ITBC (2021) states that choices should be "driven by bringing benefits to stakeholders, First Nation communities and the [ITBC] organization, to help them…strengthen their competitiveness for the future" (ITBC, 2021, p. 2). This process involves continuously connecting and valuing Indigenous tourism businesses for their contribution to local communities and economy. Similarly, at the regional level, there is an emphasis towards a more structured and collaborative approach to building tourism, which includes better resource management, coordination of land use and treaty land rights, cooperating with other industries, and Indigenous communities (Destination BC, 2017c). While not fully fleshed out, the approach is expected to inform and engage with communities to generate greater representation in in official community plans, economic development plans, regional growth strategies, and land use planning processes (Destination BC, 2017a, 2017c, 2017j, 2017k, 2017l).

Social sustainability can truly be achieved through commitments to building working relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous government agencies, marketing organizations, tourism associations and communities. Collaboration could advance reconciliation, celebrate diversity and inclusion, and preserve and promote Indigenous heritage. All these factors could enhance Indigenous Peoples' quality in economic and social well-being. As a result, trust and reciprocity between these actors are fundamental to social sustainability though it should be achieved through the policy and management of tourism (Kim et al., 2013; Ridderstaat et al., 2016). While it may be implied, prior to 2019, ITBC and BC government phrased collaboration mainly as a component to boost the industry and province's competitiveness in the global tourism market rather than as a vehicle for reconciliation (ITBC, 2017, 2021; Government of BC, 2012). Regardless, in whether it is explicitly stated or not, the overall outcomes remain the same where effective measures must take place to consult and cooperate with Indigenous Peoples.

Several studies that highlight that responsible tourism development is essential to enhancing the quality of life of stakeholders (Mathew & Sreejesh, 2016; Roca-Puig, 2019). What is critical to this discussion is that positive attitudes towards tourism is reflected by the perceived benefits accrued from participation (Garau-Vadell, Gutiérrez-Taño & Diaz-Armas, 2019). Kim et al.'s (2013) finds that residents generally experience social impacts of tourism as positive, due to increased revenue and services and strengthening of their community. In addition, Ridderstaat, Croes and Nijkamp (2016) describes that quality of life, tourism and economics influences the direction for investment in development of tourism. As indicated by the regional strategies, when investments increase for business development, infrastructure and services, including public space, transportation systems, safety, health services, housing and cultural institutions, it not only engages visitors but also contributes to the social well-being for residents (Destination BC, 2017, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017e; Helgadóttir & Sigurðardóttir, 2018).

Helgadóttir et al. (2019) notes that poor organization and planning can inhibit the co-existence of residents, the industry and tourists in public spaces as the tourism industry's use of limited access spaces, commodities and services created and maintained by taxpayers can lead to a negative perception that tourism is taking more than it gives (Anderek & Nyaupane, 2011). These services and amenities include policing, road infrastructure, healthcare and shared natural and cultural resources. Helgadóttir et al. (2019) notes that in an interview, Icelandic residents state that profit should not come at the expense of quality of not only the tourism industry but also their living standards. Similarly, regional strategies indicate a need to focus on improving social-economic circumstances and to better understand them to create positive change within communities, with tourism playing a role in reducing homelessness/poverty, and increasing visitor safety and accessibility (Destination BC, 2017, 2019).

Environmental Sustainability by Protecting the Natural Environment

Butler (1999) states that sustainable development needs to ensure that tourism "does not degrade or alter the environment (human and physical)...to such a degree that it prohibits the successful development and well-being of other activities and processes" (p. 35). Yet, there is a common trade-off between economic growth and environmental

preservation as stakeholders primarily focus on economic benefits derived over providing adequate protection of critical environmental resources and assets that form the basis for visitor interest and loyalty (Yang et al., 2023).

Similar to Yang et al.'s (2023) observation, ITBC and the BC government's strategies from 2012-2019 had an underwhelmingly low reference and consideration to environmental protection and conservation compared to the economic and social needs to achieving sustainable tourism (Government of BC, 2012; Government of BC, 2015; AtBC, 2012, ITBC, 2017). In fact, the BC strategies from 2012-2015 did not mention any considerations or actions towards this concern. Instead, the environment was referenced in terms of promoting and supporting nature-based tourism businesses by determining Crown land tenure policies and procedures to reduce conflict between tenured and non-tenured users (Government of BC, 2015; Government of BC, 2012).

ITBC (2021) mentioned that its role is to support "all tourism-related Indigenous businesses to increase their economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits through tourism" (p. 24). Moreover, "environmental sustainability [is] considered to be integral to quality, authentic [Indigenous] cultural experiences", however, the association did not further elaborate on what environmental sustainability entailed (AtBC, 2012, p. 22). As a result, it was difficult to compare what environmental sustainability consisted of from an Indigenous perspective in relation to the BC government's strategies.

It's important to note that BC's strategies in 2019 and 2021 revealed the need to respect the natural landscapes and environment by strategically guiding and managing tourism growth while preserving BC's natural spaces (Government of BC, 2019; Government of BC, 2021). However, the framing for reducing adverse environmental impacts was more directed towards protecting the province's tourism assets, such as trails, recreation sites, ski hills, fishing lodges, hunting camps and other infrastructure. For example, the 2019 strategy states that the "diversity of ecosystems and abundance of wildlife draws visitors from far and wide, making protection of the environment essential to the long-term growth and success of our tourism industry" (Government of BC, 2019, p. 5). Respecting and preserving the natural environment is critical to maintaining business viability in tourism and livability for residents over the long term (Government of BC, 2019). Notably, in 2021, the BC government expanded its actions to finding solutions for collaborating with tourism stakeholders, including Indigenous

stakeholders on common sustainability policies and practices, including promoting active transportation plans to reduce tourism emissions, responding to climate risks to induce resiliency from extreme weather events, as well as encouraging safe, responsible, and respectful outdoor recreation through education (Government of BC, 2022).

Compared to ITBC and the BC government, the regional strategies provide more in-depth descriptions for environmental sustainability, especially with considerations to Indigenous communities and tourism stakeholders. Regional strategies, particularly in planning areas that are fundamentally nature-based tourism destinations, such as South-Central Island and North Island on Vancouver Island place a greater emphasis on the concern that the demand for outdoor and nature-based activities can potentially result in the degradation of natural spaces. Furthermore, it is vital to determine a coordinated framework to manage visitor capacity and management based on visitor growth projections and dispersion around the region (Destination BC, 2017c; Destination BC, 2018a). Another factor critical to the environmental dimension is recognizing ecological limitations when it comes to visitor traffic, coexistence with other valued industries, including mining, agriculture and forestry, and infrastructure development (Destination BC, 2017b). Not only that, but it must respect traditional ways of life in wildlife management plans for fishing and hunting to balance with community priorities and other tourism activities (Destination BC, 2017b, p. 44). Other actions involve "educat[ing] visitors on the role they play in understanding and being stewards of the natural environment" through "no trace" principles, understanding wildlife sensitivities, and "promot[ing] green tourism and create best practices to reduce impacts" (Destination BC, 2017b, p. 42; Destination BC, 2017, p. 9; Destination BC, 2019b, p. 32). Of importance is the need to ensure tourism activities do not negatively impact wildlife or incur displacement.

As part of environmental sustainability leadership practices, regional strategies suggest that safeguarding the natural environment requires adhering to sustainable operating policies that align with not only provincial but also First Nations policy, such as establishing standards and expectations for businesses to achieve, including waste management and water management as well as reducing marine and land-based wildlife impacts from human activity through eco-tourism and wildlife viewing (Destination BC, 2017a; Destination BC, 2018). Although it is difficult to determine whether or not Indigenous tourism stakeholders provided the environmental factors in the regional DDS,

ITBC, Indigenous tourism operators and businesses, as well as First Nations were identified as key actors in the tourism network for realizing the listed goals (Destination BC, 2017a; Destination BC, 2017c, 2017d, 2017e, 2018, 2018a, 2019b; Destination BC, 2018a,).

The results are similar to the academic literature, as it is acknowledged that uncontrolled growth of the industry to achieve quick profits often leads to adverse consequences ranging from environmental damage and loss in natural resources (Sharpley, 2009). Tourism can create serious environmental problems from excessive energy consumption and increasing environmental effects including climate change. Uncontrolled expansion of tourism infrastructure and visitor flows can diminish the quality and quantity of natural landscapes as well as the quality life of local communities (Streimikiene et al., 2020). Therefore, strong consideration for sustainability not only accounts for preserving the environment but also the social considerations of local communities (Sterling, 2010).

Chapter 5.

Summary and Conclusion

This research sought to identify the notion of sustainable tourism in the Indigenous tourism industry and the extent to which it is represented in the broader tourism sector. The findings reveal that sustainability heavily relies on destination development, with a strong need to prioritize visitor expectations and desires. The characteristics aligned with previous studies that examined the economic, environment and social dimensions of sustainable tourism (Akbar & Hallak, 2019; Torres-Delgado & Saarinen, 2014; Asmelash & Kumar, 2019) for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous-led strategies. The characteristics primarily focused on economic growth, environmental protection, and quality of life. This study discovered that sustainable tourism tends to focus on factors that leaned towards economic measures – particularly revenue growth, number of employment opportunities, and the number of market-ready, and export-ready businesses. As a result, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous-led strategies showed similar approaches to achieving sustainable tourism.

Critically, the study was only able to examine frameworks from ITBC, the Government of BC, and Destination BC, which provided a glimpse into the priority objectives and goals for the Indigenous tourism industry and BC's tourism sector. While the regional DDS provided different actions that were more context specific, with a stronger emphasis on the value and importance of Indigenous tourism, this research was unable to determine the weight in which Indigenous tourism stakeholders contributed to these ideas. In addition, specific and detailed connections to other tangible and intangible factors, such as connection to community and cultural preservation and revitalization that were determined to be vital to sustainable tourism (Lemelin et al., 2015; Akbar & Hallak, 2019) were not clearly found.

Of significance, the Government of BC's strategies set the precedence for the direction and priorities of the tourism sector. As a guiding framework for the province, the BC government has a strong influence over what should be considered as success and areas of focus for industry development and sustainability. For instance, ITBC has indicated that their organization has budget constraints which limit its capacity to link to

provincial priorities (ITBC, 2021). Furthermore, the tourism industry lacks understanding "for how best to include Indigenous tourism as a part of the woven fabric" (ITBC, 2021, p. 11). Therefore, it is unclear as to whether or not other important priorities were excluded as a result of this working relationship. Though it is worth noting that previous studies have shown that the general factors identified for sustainable tourism, similar to the ones in this study, have ignored the potential for Indigenous businesses to contribute to a more sustainable tourism industry by focusing on financial success. As the literature states, Indigenous entrepreneurs are not a homogenous group and have diverse needs linked to their culture and geographical location (Foley, 2003). Therefore, more flexible government support is needed to meet them (Collins et al., 2017; Liang & Bao, 2018). There needs to be greater understanding of the key factors crucial to sustainable tourism, including economic benefits, culture and environmental preservation (Walker & Moscardo, 2014; Carr, Ruhanen & Whitford, 2016), such as social aims such as jobs for community members or contributions to the community (Collins et al., 2017; Lemelin et al., 2015).

Sustainable tourism development is a dynamic process that is constantly changing and experiencing new challenges. For the sector to be sustainable, it is necessary to address and resolve challenges and issues that may arise for specific industries, especially priority ones such as Indigenous tourism. This study was able to touch upon some of the critical factors to achieving sustainable tourism and add some understanding to the discourse on Indigenous tourism in BC and Canada. It is hoped that this will promote more in-depth considerations to integrate and support Indigenous tourism stakeholders' sustainable tourism development goals.

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Appendix

Supplemental Material and Primary Documents

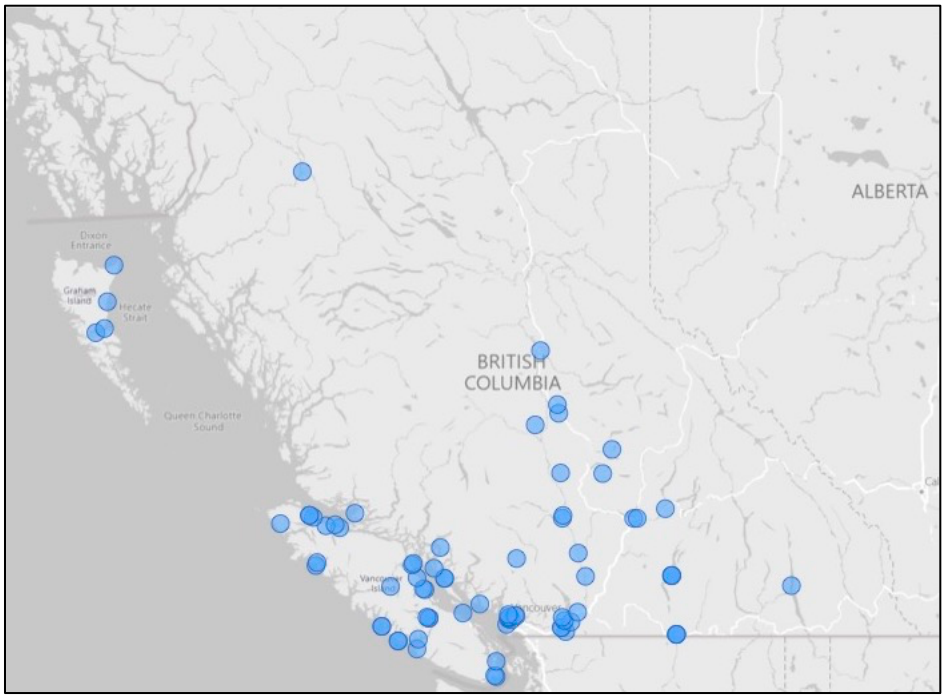

Figure A.1. Map of Indigenous communities and/or businesses

Note: The map shows the 88 communities and/or businesses I attempted to contact as possible research partners or participants.

Table A.1. List of strategic policy and planning documents for analysis

Author	Year	Name
Government of BC	2012-2016	Gaining the Edge: A Five-Year Strategy for Tourism in British Columbia
	2015-2018	Gaining the Edge: 2015-2018 – British Columbia's Tourism Strategy
	2019-2021	Welcoming Visitors – Benefiting Locals – Working Together: A Strategic Framework for Tourism in British Columbia 2019-2021
	2022-2024	Strategic Framework for Tourism 2022-2021: A Plan for Recovery and Resiliency
ITBC	2012-2017	The Next Phase: 2012-2017 A Five-year Strategy for Aboriginal Cultural Tourism in British Columbia
	2017-2022	Celebrating 20 Years: Corporate Plan 2017-2022 Pulling Together
	2021-2024	Indigenous Alignment Strategy 2021-2024 3 Year Plan: Pulling Together for Recovery

Destination BC/RDMOs	2018	Cariboo-Chilcotin Coast: Destination Development Strategy
	2018	Interlakes: Destination Development Strategy
	2017	Gold Rush Trail: Destination Development Strategy
	2018	Sea-to-Sky: Destination Development Strategy
	2017	Columbia Valley: Destination Development Strategy
	2019	Kootenay Rockies: Destination Development Strategy
	2017	West Kootenay and Revelstoke: Destination Development Strategy
	2017	Highway 1 Corridor: Destination Development Strategy
	2017	Highway 3 Corridor: Destination Development Strategy
	2019	Northeastern BC: Destination Development Strategy
	2019	Northwestern BC: Destination Development Strategy
	2017	North Thompson and Nicola Valleys: Destination Development Strategy
	2017	Okanagan Valley: Destination Development Strategy
	2017	Shuswap-North Okanagan: Destination Development Strategy
	2019	Embracing Our Potential 2.0: Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association
	2017	Fraser Valley: Destination Development Strategy
	2017	Metro Vancouver: Destination Development Strategy
	2017	Sunshine Coast: Destination Development Strategy
	2019	Vancouver, Coast & Mountains: Destination Development Strategy
	2017	Greater Victoria: Destination Development Strategy
	2018	North Island: Destination Development Strategy
	2017	South Central: Destination Development Strategy