Aesthetic and experience values

FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE AND THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

Tropical Water Quality Hub
National Environmental Science Programme

Griffith UNIVERSITY
Queensland, Australia

THE BEAUTY OF CORAL REEFS

First Nations people have been the custodians of country for tens of thousands of years. Increasingly, First Nations people are utilizing tourism as a vehicle to develop sustainable entrepreneurial tourism ventures which, among other things, enhance authentic cultural interactions, bolster employment and provide economic empowerment for Indigenous peoples. The release of Queensland's inaugural First Nations Tourism Plan, will facilitate increased opportunities for First Nations people to showcase unique tourism experiences in and around Queensland, including the Great Barrier Reef (GBR), to Australia and the rest of the world.

This research project enlisted the assistance of First Nations people to help understand how ecological changes at the GBR affect the aesthetic value and the user experience from the perspective of First Nations people. As custodians of the land, First Nations peoples' perspectives, knowledges and connections to country must be considered in tourism planning and development. The participants represented First Nations people from a diverse range of language regions spanning from Central and Western New South Wales up to, and including, Northern and Western Queensland, and provided a broad representation of First Nations perspectives pertaining to the perceived aesthetic beauty of the GBR.

FINDINGS

- When asked about the beauty of the reef, it emerged that First Nations people have a stronger bond with the GBR in comparison to non-indigenous users. They often called the reef regions "our home/house". First Nations people tended to overrate highly aesthetic scenes and underscore less aesthetic scenes in comparison to the two user groups.

- First Nations people have richer experiences when they visit the GBR (e.g. diving/snorkelling experiences) and they hold deeper knowledge about the GBR.

- First Nations people have a negative attitude toward overtourism in the reef regions. They recommended the necessity of more culturally and environmentally responsible tourism activities.

- When confronted with less beautiful images, First Nations people expressed the most negative emotions toward the declining state of the GBR.

- First Nations people were the most eager to support the GBR conservation programs and coral restoration, suggesting that the damaged areas of the Reef are the house that has to be cleaned and rebuilt. They highlighted the lack of Indigenous involvement in conservation programs and would like to contribute and volunteer for future projects.

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2020 IS THE YEAR OF INDIGENOUS TOURISM IN QUEENSLAND.

METHOD

In total, 49 First Nations people were recruited in two rounds of data collection. First, 14 participants from various regions across NSW and Queensland were involved in two focus groups to gain First Nation peoples' opinions and Indigenous knowledges about the aesthetic values of the GBR. In addition, participants from Australian and Chinese user groups participated in the research.

These focus groups were facilitated by Yugambeh Museum and the Yugambeh Youth Choir and were held on Yugambeh and Kombumerri peoples' land. In the second round, Griffith University's Gumurri Support Unit, which is located on Yugarabul, Yuggera, Jagera and Turrbal, Yugambeh and Kombumerri peoples land, made it possible to hold 35 individual interviews with staff and students from the Gumurri Support Unit. These First Nations participants were from diverse regions across the country and were asked to use eye-tracking and face-reader technologies to enable a better understanding of First Nations peoples' thoughts, attitudes, approaches and emotions toward the beauty of the GBR.

