

# Barriers to Māori Tourism Business

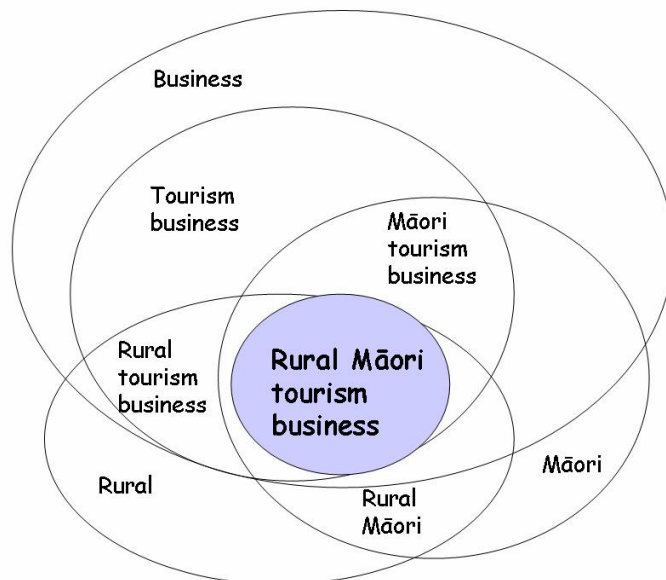
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## Extended Abstract

This paper reflects research in two separate areas with different iwi Māori. This work is the result of the first year of a four year action research project to understand how rural Māori tourism businesses are overcoming the difficulties they face in trying to set up or grow their tourism businesses. We spent this first year building working relationships with participating Māori groups in two case study regions and completing 30 interviews with businesses in our Northern case study area (there are no existing Māori tourism businesses within our second case study area), and building relationships with individuals in both case study areas who support business development. The data analysed here come from the interviews and from records of the monthly meetings and activities we conducted with our working group in the Southern case study area.

The literature on issues confronting businesses and Māori tourism businesses is focused mainly on the businesses themselves; for example, the Stafford Report (2001) names the key barriers as lack of finance, lack of knowledge about business and lack of Māori decision makers in the tourism industry, and lack of willingness to participate in business on the part of Māori. We aim to highlight the complexity with which rural Māori tourism businesses have to deal by looking at the wider rural Māori tourism system within which they operate.

To do this we analyse the complex system within which rural Māori tourism businesses operate. We divide the system in two ways. First, we look at the *layers* that appear in the term “rural Māori tourism business”; thus, we take apart the term to understand the issues faced by businesses, rural people, Māori people and tourism businesses (see Fig. 1). Second, it is also helpful to consider the “proximity” of the issue to the business and so we sometimes divide our system into several *levels*—local, regional, national and international.



**Figure 1: The many different layers of influence that impact on rural Māori tourism businesses**

*Layers* are used as the basic structure of the paper and *levels* are used within that structure when it is useful to highlight the proximity of the issue. It can be difficult to decide exactly which level an issue comes from – a reflection of the complex adaptive nature of the systems under study; therefore, this should be read only as a general indication of the level at which the influence initiates. Our central argument is that rural Māori tourism businesses deal with more complexity than other businesses,

other tourism businesses, and other Māori businesses in urban areas or even non-Māori rural businesses.

*Issues at the level of individual business and tourism business*

Business is difficult. At a local level, many new businesses fail within their first year and of those that do make it through, success usually comes through very hard work and family help. At a national level, all businesses are affected by government policies and are adversely affected by frequent changes in these policies (Vonortas 2002). Likewise, tourism business requires a diversity of skills which seldom exist in one person; moreover, issues such as seasonality and international factors that affect the international tourism market resist influence by New Zealand businesses.

*Issues in communication and access to services that rural people face*

In our case studies, rural people have to deal with local and regional issues such as bad roading, slow and erratic telecommunications and poor access to services and facilities, and they find it even more difficult than urban businesses to get good staff. In addition, there is a great deal to learn about collaborating effectively with neighbouring businesses who are often seen as competitors. The roads in our Northern Case Study region are narrow, windy, gravel roads that often wash out. As one informant noted, road signage in the wider area can significantly affect the travel patterns of tourists, yet it appears that there are few regional or national resources to support signage.

In both our case studies, rural residents without an external source of income can struggle to access reliable services such as lawyers, accountants and business courses—services which can help set up a business. As Horn et al. (1998) found in another rural area, rural tourism businesses can have difficulty getting local staff with the skills and inclination to work with foreign tourists. This is also the case for the rural Māori tourism businesses we studied and is a concern for the groups we work with in the South. The problem is exacerbated because, once equipped with those skills, local people often choose to leave the area for more lucrative and challenging work. Thus, a negative feedback loop operates – few skilled people live in the area because there are no businesses requiring those skills, but it is difficult to set up new business because there are so few skilled people in the area.

*Issues for Māori in the current New Zealand historical/ political context.*

The situation of Māori in the New Zealand historical/political context influences tourism businesses in three main ways. First, the historical context of colonisation and events over the last century affects relationships between Māori communities and their non-Māori visitors. It can also affect other businesses or information staff that refer customers to places or businesses. Likewise, it affects relationships between Māori and agencies that manage land, such as the Department of Conservation or local councils, particularly when ownership of that land is contested.

Second, a range of local and national agencies influence rural Māori tourism businesses through the medium of “Māoriness.” While Māori are encouraged by tourism agencies to enter into tourism because they believe that “Māoriness” confers potential advantage, it is not entirely clear what this advantage is for businesses outside mainstream Māori tourism products such as concert parties and marae visits. Such advantage depends on having a customer who recognises nuances in the meaning of “Māori” in the New Zealand context and interprets those meanings in a positive light. However, our research (Wilson, Doherty & Hart 2006) indicates that overseas tourists are often unaware of Māori culture as part of a product in which the Māori elements are more subtle, or based on everyday aspects of Māori life and culture.

Third, Government agencies also influence Māori business through different kinds of assistance. Thus, even well targeted government assistance can have unintended consequences at local level because of the nature of that targeting. Our own research programme provides such an example, particularly in our Southern case study where the focus is on tourism but where there might be good reasons for looking at a broader range of business options.

*Issues for Rural Māori in tourism business: Managing cultural demands*

Rural Māori face issues beyond those experienced by Māori living in urban areas away from their home. The structure of Māori land ownership, community, and the sociocultural history of the area all

impact on rural Māori and any business that they might want to develop. Māori communities function around *whakapapa* (kinship ties). They have a very long, well-remembered history that underlies local power relations and social structures, and community members can spend a great deal of voluntary time working for local *rūnanga* or tribal meetings. Those with greatest capacity have many demands placed on their time and these people are also those with the capacity to run a business; consequently, the business is seldom the sole focus of rural Māori tourism business owners.

For Māori tourism businesses in particular, tensions can arise between managing the presence of paying visitors and the needs and customs of the local people. For example, a *tangi* (funeral) requires the participation of all in the community and working for personal gain during a *tangi* is not a generally acceptable practice.

#### *Need for collaboration*

A lack of local and regional collaboration, or perhaps the lack of a facilitator, also presents a barrier for Māori in rural areas. A few businesses in our Northern Case study have some networks with other businesses for marketing, etc.; however, many of the businesses we spoke with have not been able to work together well so far and it is taking some time for potential coordinating groups to become effective. In both case studies, building collaborative potential has been a major difficulty; consequently, it has been a key objective of our research activity in the southern case study.

#### *Conclusion.*

Overall, rural Māori tourism businesses face far more complexity than other tourism businesses. Rural Māori tourism businesses face many systemic barriers – barriers arising from events and processes occurring well beyond the boundaries of the business itself. These barriers are experienced by businesses, Māori, rural residents and tourism business everywhere – the issues overlap at the nexus formed by rural Māori tourism business and although many issues are systemic, mitigating their effects is the responsibility of individual businesses, even if that means working out how to work together to create change in the wider system.

Our future research is aimed at overcoming barriers and testing ways this might be facilitated. We do this while acknowledging the large research literature on regional economic development, sustainable community development and business development, but also while asking the questions: How do rural Māori tourism businesses take up relevant information, how can we facilitate better use of that information, and what learning is required for both facilitators and businesses in trying to make use of the information and ideas available?

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