ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Rural change and tourism in remote regions: Developments and Indigenous endeavour in Westland, Te Tai o Poutini, Aotearoa New Zealand

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Abstract

Remote rural areas have encountered significant change and the need for renegotiation of economic and social priorities in the late 20th and early 21st century. In our broader research, we ask how have such communities been responding to this change? What role have different organisations and agencies played? And, how have they acted on the aspirations of marginalised communities? In this paper we examine these issues through a case study of Westland District on the west coast of Aotearoa New Zealand's South Island. We probe the general shift towards prioritising tourism in the District, and highlight particular experiences in regard to Indigenous endeavour in tourism. We find that those engaged in leading local development and tourism have not collaborated strategically across the sector and have not established meaningful partnerships with the community that recognise both economic and socio-cultural aspirations.

KEYWORDS

indigenous tourism, locally led development, New Zealand, remote towns, rural development, small towns

1 | INTRODUCTION

> There are some tourists that come through …, get a rental car in Christchurch, drive to the Coast and think they can then drive to Queenstown in 2 or 3 hours and have no idea of the distances on the Coast or all the things that are available to see. We are hoping we can change that perspective on things, but it is going to take time, it is just a matter of changing that perspective. (Key Informant 4)

The above quotation is from an interview with an informant from Westland District Council. It demonstrates a proactive stance on shifting tourist understandings and thereby building on tourism potential in the West Coast area—a counter to major social and economic change in the District. Media attention has often overstated the fate of "zombie-towns" and the seemingly bleak future of rural areas around the world in response to the decline of population and primary industries. Contrary to this, some rural areas are growing at a rapid rate and can help to form the backbone of a nation's economy. The changing functions of small towns, combined with a societal shift from production to consumption, are allowing for the emergence of new activities in rural areas. However, there is limited understanding of the changes that are occurring in such locations, particularly in terms of the types and impacts of development, and planning and

decision-making practices. Therefore, the rationale for the present research has been to explore how rural and small towns have engaged with and led major shifts in direction, using the case study of Westland District. In this paper, we consider these changes first at a broad level, then at the level of the District, and finally we contemplate the specific context of Indigenous development within the District.

2 | LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AND SMALL TOWNS

Recent decades have seen dramatic changes affect rural and small towns across the globe (Gibb & Nel, 2007). This has resulted in some small towns growing, some plateauing and some declining. Others have operated in cycles of growth and decline (Knox & Mayer, 2013). In contrast to cities, small towns have often tended to be limited to singular industries which makes them more susceptible to the impacts of wider economic conditions and broader contexts (Hinderink & Titus, 2002).

However, some commentators claim that the communities of small towns themselves can turn their economies around and that, coupled with strategic planning, can promote successful development (Van Niekerk & Marais, 2008). Furthermore, several argue that the resilient communities are the ones with a more diversified economy that have purposively captured growth, and these are the towns that can survive cycles of "boom" and "bust" (Argent, Rolley, & Walmsley, 2008; Collits, 2001; McManus et al., 2012).

Nevertheless, critical in deliberately planning for development are the roles of a variety of institutions and organisations from the local through to the national level (Everingham, 2006; Nel & Rogerson, 2007). For example, Nel and Rogerson (2007) found that intervention at the national level can help to create the conditions necessary for local action to occur. Yet, often rural areas and small towns are either neglected in national policy or treated as an homogenous entity (Knox & Mayer, 2010).

In response to this context, we set out to examine the roles played by local organisations and agencies in locally led development in rural locations. Local government, for example, has a key role to play in local development responses to the changes experienced in rural communities. But how are they doing this?

Often related to local government, but not always, is the role of leadership as an important contributing factor in development at the regional level (Beer & Clower, 2014; Perkins et al., 2019; Nel, Connelly & Stevenson, 2019). Leadership can be critical to understanding why some rural towns grow and others languish. The ability of a community to capitalise on opportunities often depends on the presence

of entrepreneurs as leaders to stimulate economic development (Bryant, 1989).

Indigenous communities and organisations can also have a very significant role in regional development. To a large degree this is being achieved via Indigenous tourism. However, there is a vast difference between tourism employed as a mechanism for Indigenous groups to maintain their culture and achieve self-determination (as well as economic sustainability) as opposed to the commodification of Indigenous products and activities by the tourism sector (Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016). What have been emerging in the last two decades are Indigenous hybrid economies that blend economic and cultural aspirations, including through tourism activities in rural areas (Fletcher, Pforr, & Brueckner, 2016). This is an important advance in Indigenous-led tourism, which has implications for broader development processes and alliances in small towns and rural districts.

Of course, expanding tourism per se is a common local economic development response to changes in rural areas that often results in positive impacts. Tourism provides an alternative to a traditional reliance on extractive and agricultural industries. It also now commonly involves multiple roles, addressing economic, social and cultural sustainability in addition to contributing to local employment, prosperity, vitality, infrastructure provision, and international networking (Muresan et al., 2016). As global interest in historic and wilderness rural locations is on the increase, it is particularly important that districts promoting a tourism path do so in a way that seeks cultural, environmental and community balance (Zhu, Liu, Wei, Li, & Wang, 2017).

Accordingly, our research has focused on locally led development in rural locations, with particular attention paid to the role of agencies, leadership, and indigenous activities in the tourism sector due to the relative importance of those elements in the locations examined. The research summarised in this article relates specifically to case study work undertaken in the Westland District.

3 | METHODOLOGY

This project used a primarily qualitative research methodology based on a single case study involving interview, survey and document analyses. Such an approach is particularly valuable when exploring relationships, interactions and practices by delving into the behaviours, values, perspectives, and opinions of those involved (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

The Westland District was selected as an appropriate case study for several reasons. Adopting a case study approach allowed a rich, contextual, in-depth investigation of the West Coast at a specific time. As a rural area, this location has experienced a significant change in the traditional sectors of its economy over recent decades due to restructuring

processes as well as external forces like the volatility of the global economy. Recently, rapid growth within an expanding tourism industry on the West Coast has placed significant pressures on the District and provides a unique example of how local economic development has occurred in rural areas within the Aotearoa New Zealand context. These features make Westland a particularly interesting case study—not in terms of representativeness but in terms of the potential for deeper insights into complex situations (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

In addition, an inductive, interpretive research procedure was used for this research. Our key themes for analysis have been derived from engaging in a dialogue between the primary data we collected and the works of relevant scholars writing in this field.

The empirical component of the work was carried out over 2018 and based primarily on 11 semi-structured interviews with key informants, including Westland District Council mayor and planning and community development officers; Development West Coast; Ngāti Waewae and Makaawhio rūnanga (the two local sub-tribal groups); Māwhera Incorporation (owned by shareholders who are descendants of Poutini Ngāi Tahu Māori); Heritage Hokitika, and other tourism and development related consultants/agencies in the Hokitika vicinity. The interview participants were selected by a purposive sampling technique, whereby we actively sought those with specialist knowledge and experience of locally led development, particularly tourism, within the Westland District and wider West Coast region. In this way, although the total number of interviews was relatively small, the participants were carefully selected to facilitate an inclusive and expansive understanding of the West Coast situation that could be analysed in a reliable, comparative but also reflexive manner.

Prior to key informant interviews being conducted at local marae (meeting places) to learn manawhenua (local sub-tribal group with territorial authority) perspectives, appropriate etiquette was followed as a matter of respect. This included working through a Māori research consultation process, offering a koha (gift) at the marae as a recognition of the reciprocity involved in the research, and beginning interactions with a time of mihi (greetings), including delivery of pepeha (personal account of the places and people with whom you are connected) and relevant credentials.

In addition, we carried out 32 questionnaire surveys with members of the public and businesses in the Westland town of Hokitika. A convenience sampling method was used to distribute surveys as this was determined to be the most effective method in the time available (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). The surveys enabled exploration of the perspectives of the wider public and businesses to gain additional insights on regional economic development, especially tourism, from beyond official organisations and development oriented agencies. The surveys produced data that was both nominal (categories with no order or value associated) and ordinal (categories with a ranking of values). While the initial intention was to obtain at least 50 completed questionnaires, due to time-constraints on the research and the availability of participants, we fell short of our preferred outcome. Nevertheless, because we were not seeking a representative sample but instead an extension of views available to us from the public sphere as opposed to the development sector, the survey results remain very useful in terms of enriching our understanding of different perspectives on locally led development plans and activities.

The empirical work was supported by analysis of relevant legislation, the West Coast Economic Development Action Plan 2017, Tai Poutini West Coast Growth Opportunities Report, the Westland District Council 10 Year Plan, as well as media articles. Media articles were obtained primarily from online media websites. An e-mail alert was set up at the beginning of the research process to identify articles published throughout the year based on the key words related to the research objectives, including "West Coast New Zealand," "Westland Tourism," "Economic Development on West Coast," "Westland," and "Hokitika." The media articles offered a variety of supplementary viewpoints and opinions on the issues being addressed in the research.

In interpreting the data we used thematic analysis with open coding to sort then analyse the interview, survey, document, and media material into themes. The ordinal data from the survey was analysed using the SPSS statistical package.

4 | RESULTS: LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IN GENERAL

The Westland District is a territorial authority located within the West Coast region in the South Island of Aotearoa New Zealand (see map in Nel & Connelly, 2019). Like most rural areas, Westland was originally developed because of its suitability for rural production activities such as agriculture, forestry, and mining. And also like most rural areas in this country, Westland has undergone major economic transformation in recent decades. The discovery of gold in the mid-1800s attracted thousands of people to the district. While gold mining is still occurring in Westland the district has developed from mining to sawmilling to dairying and is now becoming a unique tourist destination for both domestic and international visitors. The district has experienced several "boom" and "bust" cycles and current growth is heavily concentrated in a small number of sectors. In the last decade, compared with stable agriculture (excluding dairying), forestry, fishing and mining activity, both dairying and tourism have played an increasingly important role in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) in the district, with tourism edging

ahead with the largest GDP since 2016 (Tourism West Coast, 2018). Accordingly, Westland District has been identified as a "surge" region by the New Zealand Government (Knuckey & Leung-Wai, 2016). While the area has always attracted visitors because of its unique natural environment and geographic features, recent years have seen unprecedented growth in visitor numbers.

Nevertheless, Westland is one of the most sparsely inhabited districts in Aotearoa New Zealand. It has a population just in excess of 8,000 people spread over an area of 12,000km^2, with a network (and hierarchy) of towns spread across the narrow north–south length of the district. Some Westland settlements have struggled to connect successfully into the shift to tourism, primarily due to funding constraints and focusing on other priorities. However, the potential for these townships to capitalise successfully on tourism opportunities is significant,

> I think most of these towns have potential because they are all on the route from Arthur's Pass through to the glaciers and going further onto Otago. I think it calls for some imaginative ways to get people's attention. Some of these towns need a real point of difference and you can kind of tell some are sleepy little towns past their hey-days and some are a bit of both. The ones that don't have the glaciers nearby, like the ones in between Hokitika and the glaciers, they are struggling because they can't identify their point of difference. (Key Informant 3)

This optimism was a theme that resonated through the key informant interviews. So, what are the key elements of the tourism-focussed economic repositioning in Westland?

4.1 | Local place-branding

Local place-branding has recently been based around the concept of Westland's "Untamed Natural Wilderness." The brand spearheads a comprehensive marketing strategy by Tourism West Coast to increase visitor numbers, disperse visitors throughout the region, and increase visitor length of stay. These objectives are also reflected in the 2017 West Coast Economic Development Action Plan. Findings from our research indicate the branding has been well received by many in the community. For example, Key Informant 4 notes that,

> The community love it because it has done so well to attract the tourists. And the branding is spot on, it is untamed wilderness. It is wild. We have the Tasman Sea which is a wild sea; you

don't go swimming in it because it is so dangerous. There is vast areas of land especially up in the mountains which very few people have gone through. You're going into country that virtually no one has gone into apart from making the track, a real wilderness. (Key Informant 4)

4.2 | Natural environment

As experienced in similar circumstances elsewhere, capitalising on the natural landscape through such branding has helped to consolidate the identity of Westland and the wider West Coast region, strengthen local citizen identification with their own area, and revalue the endogenous natural resources (de San Eugenio-Vela & Barniol-Carcasona, 2015). This benefits not only visitors to the area, but also enhances the coherence of the local identity for communities.

The natural environment is the most significant tourism resource for Westland. The public conservation estate takes up 83% of the total geographical area of the Westland District. The natural environment within this conservation land, such as lakes, rivers, gorges, waterfalls, beaches, natural geothermal hot pools, forests, endemic bird species, Alps and glaciers, has been capitalised on by most settlements and promoted regionally, nationally and internationally. For example, the settlements of Franz Josef and Fox Glacier have been especially successful in drawing visitors courtesy of the associated glaciers. Franz Josef is one of the busiest and fastest-growing tourist centres on the West Coast. It has up to 6,000 tourists a night in peak tourist season.

4.3 | Heritage

Heritage is another key element of the tourism bundle in Westland. Many of the rural settlements for example, offer rich historic assets especially based on gold mining from the 1860s. The West Coast Wilderness Trail (established in 2010) is now playing a critical role in highlighting this heritage. Various settlements and routes previously known for gold mining or hydro-dam construction, for example, are positioned along—and benefit from—the trail.

Such cycle trails have provided an important opportunity for rural areas to stimulate economic development, including the revitalisation of towns previously experiencing significant decline,

> The cycle trail is really what is breathing life into the area. The people are a lot older and are more interested in the histories of the area so they are willing to look around and spend

money on accommodation and eating out—that type of thing. So the trail is perfect for that group of tourists. (Key Informant 2)

In 2010, John Key came along and said we are going to build a cycleway. So that was what is now called the West Coast Wilderness Trail. That goes from Greymouth through Kūmara, up through cowboy paradise, through here [Hokitika] and down into Ross. It really helped to breathe life into some of the towns that would have disappeared off the map entirely. (Key Informant 1)

Several businesses have established to provide accommodation and other services to riders on the trail. Key Informant 2 notes that visitors have tended to stay only 1.25 nights on the West Coast. However, the success of the trail and the associated businesses has seen the average length of stay increase to 4.3 nights (Gurden Consulting Ltd, 2017). These visitors are staying in the townships that can provide accommodation and facilities such as Kūmara, Hokitika and Ross. At least 30 direct jobs have already been created because of the cycle trail, and rider numbers are expected to double within the next 5 years (Key Informant 8).

4.4 | Events

Events also play a significant role in the economic development of Westland, making some townships iconic outside of the region. For example, the Hokitika Wild Foods Festival is a renowned annual event that has gained a substantial reputation across New Zealand. As are the "Coast to Coast" race, the Driftwood and Sand Exhibition on Hokitika beach, and Feral Fashion.

4.5 | Culture

Finally, "culture" is also a substantial element of the Westland tourism industry. In particular, there is a strong Indigenous Māori presence in Westland, both in terms of broader iwi (regional level) activities by Ngāi Tahu, and hapū (local level) activities by Ngāti Waewae and Makaawhio. For example, local group Ngāti Waewae is based adjacent to the Arahura River, a short distance from Hokitika. Development of the Arahura Marae by Ngāti Waewae in 2014 has helped to attract Māori community members back to the area and acted as a hub to stimulate Māori cultural tourism. Pounamu/jade from the Arahura River is highly treasured by Ngāti Waewae. It not only has immense cultural significance but is notable as an historic trading entity, a symbol of strength and peace, a material that can be crafted into tools and weapons, and now it forms part of an economic activity

within the tourism industry by virtue of pounamu-based river and bush tours and pendant carving and sales.

Similarly, the role of the wider tribal group, Ngāi Tahu, has also been significant. Ngāi Tahu Tourism—a division of the corporate arm of the main South Island tribe—has several key investments in the Westland District. These include glacier tours, accommodation, and a thermal spa experience.

For local Māori, tourism is not only an important economic opportunity, but it also provides a mechanism to maintain and revive cultural understandings and practices within the local hapū. Their tourism activities enhance economic benefits, while ensuring Indigenous narratives are kept alive for hapū members and that there is ongoing opportunity for furthering cultural revival.

Nonetheless, the tourism industry in the area has not always respected Indigenous rights to own and manage cultural content in the sector. So what kind of experience are Māori groups currently encountering in the tourism industry of Westland? The findings in our research related to Indigenous activities were particularly striking. Therefore, the following section offers a more substantial coverage of these findings as compared to the treatment given to the rest of the study.

5 | RESULTS: INDIGENOUS EXPERIENCE

Indigenous groups play a significant role in development in rural areas. While Indigenous populations are a relatively small portion of national populations, they are often a much larger proportion of the population in rural regions (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2018). In Aotearoa New Zealand, various types of Māori groups and agencies are playing a considerable role in regional development in many locations. Yet, within rural contexts in many countries, there is often a weak connection between Indigenous groups, agencies responsible for Indigenous affairs, and constituencies and agencies involved in rural and regional development strategies (OECD, 2018). Difficult historical contexts and the challenges associated with achieving self-determination and sovereignty has resulted in institutionalised obstructions with respect to rural and regional development. This has been exhibited in characterisations, by mainstream institutions, that Indigenous communities are an impediment to economic development because of conflicts arising over resource use and infrastructural projects. In addition, the multiplicity of relevant stakeholders in Indigenous tourism, including local sub-tribal groups, Indigenous authorities, Indigenous businesses, regional tribal bodies, regional tribal corporate organisations, as well as local, regional, and central government and tourism agencies, makes for complicated interactions

across "uneven terrains of power" (Higgins-Desbiolles & Akbar, 2018, p. 16).

Furthermore, there have been compromising practices in the past in terms of the "use" of Indigenous cultures to achieve wider tourism gains. Zygadlo, Matunga, Simmons, and Fairweather (2001) note that inappropriate use of Māori culture previously in Westland has had a negative impact on local Māori. For example, some traditional activities and performances have adapted for tourism purposes, and the culture has been taken out of context by misrepresentation and tokenistic gestures on the part of tourism operators. This results in a depreciation of taonga Māori (Māori treasured things) and a diminishing of the control local Māori have over the portrayal of their culture and heritage (see also Ryks et al., 2019). These practices are slowly being replaced by developments that facilitate Indigenous tourism on Indigenous terms (Higgins-Desbiolles & Akbar, 2018).

5.1 | Māori centred approach

In the Westland District context, the Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act 1998 has provided opportunities for local Māori to participate actively in the economic development of the area. The Ngāi Tahu Pounamu authentication scheme is an example of a successful initiative built upon customary economic structures (Barr & Reid, 2014). In 1997, the New Zealand government vested ownership of all pounamu in the iwi, Ngāi Tahu. This asset transfer was part of the Ngāi Tahu treaty settlement claim. The iwi invested in an online tracing, marketing, and sales portal for the sale of authentic Ngāi Tahu Pounamu jewellery. Hapū Ngāti Waewae and Makaawhio are now engaged in the commercial extraction and manufacturing of pounamu in line with this initiative. The harvesting and manufacturing process is undertaken at the hapū scale which facilitates multiple individual and family pounamu carvers to supply their physical and online shops (Barr & Reid, 2014). While not without its intra-tribal complexities, this has appreciably benefited both hapū and individual carvers involved in the scheme and in turn the activities contribute a portion of the turnover back to benefit the wider tribe in terms of social and cultural initiatives (Reid & Rout, 2016). Hence Indigenous-led tourism development has delivered cultural and economic benefit at individual, sub-tribal and tribal scales. This Māori centred approach is invaluable in managing the spiritual, cultural, social and environmental aspirations that contribute to a business strategy in the Indigenous context.

5.2 | Future planning

Building on such an approach for the future is a high priority for local Māori. The Tai Poutini Māori Tourism Strategy is

one mechanism to assist with that. It is the responsibility of Te Rūnanga o Makaawhio, Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Waewae, Māwhera Incorporation, Ngāi Tahu Tourism and local Māori tourism operators. The intention is to ensure that tourism experiences have a compelling Māori component and share the rich local histories, narratives and traditions. The strategy should enhance potential new business opportunities that will employ local Māori and heighten the presence of Māori culture in tourism. For example, there are plans for a Māori tourism trail that both tells a story through interpretation panels or art installations at key sites, with a path for visitors to follow through the region that captures the major attractions, destinations and Māori tourism operations (West Coast Regional Council, 2017). It is intended that the strategy will support whānau, hapū and individual Māori to take up the economic opportunities arising from the growing tourism industry.

5.3 | Socio-cultural revival

For local Māori, tourism is not only an important economic opportunity, but also provides potential to enhance their socio-cultural revival and community development. By way of example, Key Informant 6 discussed the venture they have established as an entrepreneurial activity called Hīkoi Waewae. The purpose of this walking/hiking group was to enable local Māori to reconnect with their ancestral lands and learn the histories of their ancestors, obtain knowledge of flora and fauna and how their ancestors utilised various resources for food, medicine, construction, among other things (Key Informant 6). They have a foundation in key values, including kaitiakitaka (stewardship/guardianship), whanaukataka (nurturing each other), manaakitaka (hospitality), and kotahitaka (building relationships). These tours have been extended to domestic and international visitors to Westland as part of a family business. They now benefit the community both economically and by ensuring local narratives are kept alive.

5.4 | Relationships and partnership

Beyond the Indigenous undertakings themselves, what are the dynamics between Māori communities and the wider body of Westland stakeholders in tourism? The relationship between the local rūnanga and local authorities in the Westland District continues to develop. The appointment of two people from Ngāti Waewae and Makaawhio to provide a voice at Council meetings is a recent initiative to establish stronger relationships. Key Informant 1 notes that,

> We just had our first meeting this month and was the very first meeting the rūnanga has

attended. The meeting before that we debated it and gave approval for it to occur and then went and approached them to ask if they would like to do this… We are all involved in so many things together like every resource consent we work together. As our biggest tourism operator, we are involved with them all the time and in the future we are involved with them as well. (Key Informant 1)

However, the decision to invite a representative from each of the two rūnanga in Westland was predominately viewed as tokenistic when we raised this with local Māori,

The Council has decided to add two rūnanga members, with one from Ngāti Waewae and Makaawhio—not as voting members, but they can observe and take part in the debate. (Key Informant 6)

The lack of voting rights is a significant issue. Key Informant 7 emphasised that a key principle in the Treaty of Waitangi was the idea of meaningful partnership between Māori and Pākehā. However, the relationship that has been established provides no decision-making power for the local rūnanga. Key Informant 6 is perturbed that as the largest tourism operator within the Westland District, Māori are treated more as a stakeholder than a partner (Key Informant 6). In order for this relationship to function as a proper partnership, Māori need to be one of the first people being consulted regarding these decisions rather than merely being another stakeholder with whom to talk (Key Informant 6).

This lack of willingness to ensure there is an adequate representation of Māori is reflected in other local governments in New Zealand. Simmonds, Kukutai, and Ryks (2016) observe that there is a lack of willingness on the part of local authorities to promote forms of Māori representation internally on boards and other decision-making forums. Webster and Cheyne (2017) found that effective inclusion of Pākehā and Māori in governance arrangements at the local level is a significant requirement as part of the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. However, Key Informant 7 noted that in the absence of fair and effective representation, attention needs to be given to how local authorities carry out their statutory responsibilities to foster Māori contribution to decision-making. As Bargh (2016) demonstrates, Māori have strong aspirations for shared governance and alongside this to engage in politics in a wide variety of ways. This includes standing for office, contributing to joint governance committees, participating in consultation, providing environmental and cultural advice and services. However, this ability for Māori to assert their self-determination in rural areas

is suppressed under tokenistic gestures entrenched in colonial practices.

Key Informant 7 remarked that the idea of placing two hapū representatives on Westland Council was only initiated in response to the plans of several organisations to develop a series of facilities related to a Pounamu Pathway through the district, including a pounamu research centre. Such a development package could help to address several gaps in information and activities related to tourism and heritage within the Westland District. Key informant 8 suggested that it could enable local people to retain, present, educate, understand and appreciate the histories and learn how the communities across the Westland District have become what they are today. It will directly target both the local communities and visitor markets. Key Informant 8 believed it could help to encourage the exploration of the district and help people understand the narratives the area "must tell." Key Informant 6 hopes the development will also allow Māori to research and understand their whakapapa and further celebrate their culture. However, informants commented that the development should only occur if a genuine form of "partnership" was able to be established. Key Informant 7 pointed out that agreement to go ahead with project planning was attained despite mixed opinions on the proposal by Māori groups such as local rūnanga, Māwhera Incorporation and Ngāi Tahu. There is concern that the collaboration between development agencies and Māori is a tokenistic gesture and the outcomes not an entirely appropriate way to showcase Māori culture. The development of the Pounamu Research Centre in Hokitika could contribute to local Māori being able to preserve, safeguard and promote their culture. Yet, key informants expressed concern that it might do little more than simply commodify Māori culture to sell to domestic and international visitors to the area. This is a clear example of the many tensions that emerge when seeking to foster tourism in a colonial context—tensions between the marketing of culture, the socio-economic wellbeing of Indigenous groups, cultural sustainability, self-determination and relationships within decision-making structures.

6 | DISCUSSION

The experiences of Māori mirror those of other Indigenous peoples who have found engagement in the tourism sector a double-edged sword (Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016). Indigenous groups working in the tourism space are increasingly seeking self-determination and establishing goals that will create sustainable social and economic futures. However, there are many obstacles to achieving their aspirations. Our research in Westland has highlighted three key sets of obstacles, which we will now discuss: lack of commitment to collaborative approaches; inadequate local government

recognition of Treaty partnership; and under-emphasis of social-cultural sustainability in development futures.

One of the key findings in the research was that the relationships between organisations and institutions working towards development in Westland were commonly ad-hoc in nature. While other research we have undertaken has demonstrated distinct advantages in strategic planning for locally led development due to the relationships across agencies, the ease of connecting due to spatial scale, and shared development goals in small districts, this was not the context that our document, survey and interview analysis demonstrated. In contrast, there was a perception that different groups in Westland had different goals and objectives and did not share a cohesive vision for the area. This finding reinforces the claims from scholars such as Petrics (2008) who argues that it is a fallacy that rural communities are relatively homogenous and therefore more cooperative. Similarly, Connelly and Nel (2017) found there is a high degree of local autonomy in the different territorial authorities on the West Coast which has reduced the overall capacity for collaborative action. They note that it was only in 2013 that work on a regional development plan began. However, the cooperation has improved since development of the West Coast Economic Action Plan 2017. Rural communities are recognising the need for greater collaboration to develop more effectively. The organisations agencies and individuals we worked with clearly understood the economic potential of a joint approach to development within the district that could enable successful economic outcomes, but were nevertheless found to operate in an ad-hoc and inconsistent manner. In particular, conflict arose in regard to both formal and informal rural tourism participation and decision making when some groups had a stronger influence on processes than others (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Jamal & Watt, 2011). Development of strong and cohesive leadership among the key organisations and institutions in rural communities is a key to successful development (Beer & Clower, 2014). McGehee, Knollenberg, and Komorowski (2015) provide an insight into the governance surrounding rural tourism development and argue there is a need to advocate beyond a business-focused approach towards a more inclusive governance framework to ensure successful rural development. By taking this approach, they contend, it is more likely that just societal outcomes for rural communities can be attained.

A second—and related—key finding was the need for more meaningful partnership between local Māori and agencies such as local government (see also Ryks et al., 2019). Bargh (2016) explored recent arguments by Māori for representation and involvement in local government decision-making based on being mana whenua (group with authority over territory). Embracing mana whenua concepts can help build resilient, sustainable regional development pathways that are also inclusive. To exemplify the potential of such pathways, Webster and Cheyne (2017) presented two case studies that illustrate how a meaningful partnership arrangement between local Māori and local governments is a possible outcome in Aotearoa New Zealand and should be sought across rural areas to ensure Indigenous groups are not marginalised in these remote locations.

While there have been steps taken to improve Māori representation in local government through the Local Electoral Act 2001, there has been minimal use of this provision (Bargh, 2016; Webster & Cheyne, 2017). Our key informants noted that Māori groups in Westland are treated more as stakeholder than partner which needs to change if any meaningful cultural development is to occur. For partnership to be consequential, Māori need to be engaged with as an equal to local government agencies such as Westland District Council. Webster and Cheyne (2017) outline possible ways forward to improve this to ensure Māori can effectively participate in decision-making at the local level. They suggest it would require Māori representatives on councils and boards to have voting rights and not just the ability to provide insight on matters where it is requested. Māori need to be able to engage actively on all matters that impact the community if partnership is to live up to the principles under the Treaty of Waitangi and if positive societal outcomes for rural communities are to be attained.

Finally, another key finding related to the work of organisations and agencies in the tourism sector and their shared focus on increasing economic gain without prioritising the socio-cultural sustainability of rural communities. In Westland and throughout the wider West Coast, it was noted that many stakeholders are more concerned with providing for visitors and increasing visitor numbers than providing for the needs of their own communities. This was regarded by many informants as pushing for greater visitor numbers despite communities already being at maximum visitor capacity, and prioritising the provision of infrastructure such as toilet blocks and car parks to accommodate visitors rather than providing for the infrastructural needs of residents. For example, the township of Arahura was found to have inadequate water supply due to salination of a bore during a tropical cyclone in February 2018 but there are no current plans to remedy the situation. As business opportunities, and employment and community facilities are created in the region, local authorities and organisations should also take care to protect residents' lifestyles and amenities. Many informants indicated that a more balanced approach between implementing tourism strategies and establishing clear priorities with communities is warranted. Nel (2015) found that at both the national and local levels, economic policies now tend to downplay social and community considerations in

favour of market-led and business-focused support. Many key informants in the research claimed that central government needed to have a greater role in rural areas that have an uneven ratepayer to visitor ratio to ensure that adequate infrastructure is provided and that economic growth from the tourism industry can continue successfully. Nel (2015) notes that in the current context of regional development, there is a growing centralisation of control of economic development, visible in the introduction of the Provincial Growth Fund announced in 2017. This is funding that could help to provide investment in rural areas experiencing significant growth, such as areas like Westland, where the ratepayer base is limited and the ability of local government to provide basic infrastructure and services in a time of tourism growth is restricted. Nel (2015) notes that smaller local authorities do not have capacity for any significant role in economic development and often only provide limited economic support, such as the encouragement of tourism-based activities and occasional small business backing. Such local authorities place greater emphasis on pro-market strategies with limited consideration of broader social and community-based development (Peet, 2012). This has significant implications for the well-being of rural communities and their socio-cultural sustainability.

7 | CONCLUSION

In conclusion, our research points to the need for agencies and institutions engaged in development and tourism endeavours in rural locations to collaborate strategically across all organisations and entrepreneurs operating in the development sphere, establishing significant partnerships that prioritise both economic and socio-cultural outcomes. In particular, the perception of Māori groups in rural areas as stakeholders rather than equal partners needs to change. Both the Crown and Māori groups must uphold the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi to achieve just social and developmental outcomes. Doing this requires local governments to share power and authority equally with local Māori. Active engagement with Māori groups will not only address Treaty obligations, but facilitate Indigenous-led operations and add a distinctive cultural and heritage tourism element to the economy that will also benefit the wider community and visitors to the district.

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