

Environmental Groups Treading the Discursive Tightrope of Social License: Australian and Canadian Cases Compared

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Environmental nongovernmental organizations are often challenged to engage in economic debates. One response is to frame contested or protected areas and species as tourism assets. In this exploratory comparative study, we examine the discourse of environmentalists and members of the tourism sector in Australia and Canada for evidence they frame tourism as a social license to protect. We find environmentalists and sympathetic ecotourism operators frame successful activism in scenic places with a history of intense environmental conflict as an investment in tourism and the local economy. This makes a case for protection from extractive industries, but falters when the adversary is tourism itself.

Keywords: social license, environmental movement, tourism, nature photography, environmental conflict, ecological modernization

In 2013, an Australian senator claimed an environmental nongovernmental organization (ENGO) campaigning against the establishment of a new iron ore mine in the island state of Tasmania did not have a social license (Mather, 2013). This was an unorthodox discursive maneuver by the politician, because a social license is generally considered something ENGOs monitor rather than attempt to earn themselves. Theorized at its simplest as “ongoing acceptance or approval from the local community . . . and other stakeholders who can affect [a business’s] profitability” (Parsons, Lacey, & Moffat, 2014, p. 84), social license is of increasing interest to practitioners and scholars of law, management, policy, governance, and corporate social responsibility (Boutilier, 2014; Boutilier, Black, & Thompson, 2012; Cullen-Knox, Eccleston, Haward, Lester, & Vince, 2017; Gunningham, Kagan, & Thornton, 2004; Lester, 2016; Moffat &

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Date submitted: 2016-11-04

¹ The authors would like to thank anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions. Lyn McGaurr’s fieldwork for this research was supported by a grant from the University of Tasmania’s Institute for the Study of Social Change. Libby Lester received funding from the Australian Research Council as part of the Discovery Project-funded research “Transnational Environmental Campaigns in the Australia-Asian Region” DP150103454 (2015-2018).

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Zang, 2014; Parsons et al., 2014; Parsons & Moffat, 2014), but has received less attention in communications disciplines. Although monitoring of social license criteria has usually taken place in commercial fields, Jijelava and Vanclay (2014) have found that social license criteria can be applied to nongovernmental humanitarian organizations. They argue that social license to operate “applies equally to non-commercial organizations as well as to corporations, irrespective of whether they seek to claim it” (Jijelava & Vanclay, 2014, p. 298). The term *social license* emerged in the U.S. pulp and paper industry in 1996 (Moore, 1996), was adopted by the Canadian oil industry in 1997 (Boutilier, 2014; Newman, 2014), and rapidly gained currency as a corporate response to “socio-political instability” (Boutilier et al., 2012) associated with the campaigns of ENGOs and grassroots activists opposed to the activities of the resources sector. More recently, social license has been discussed in relation to a range of enterprises, including forestry (Lester, 2016), salmon farming (Leith, Ogier, & Haward, 2014), wind farms (Hall, Ashworth, & Shaw, 2012), and construction (Boutilier & Zdziarski, 2017). Yet even when corporate ambitions for legitimacy cohere around a “core” (Cullen-Knox et al., 2017) of social license, that legitimacy may be challenged by ENGOs and other “oppositional actors” who make social license “their own weapon of choice” (Curran, 2015, p. 191).

To date, social license has received limited attention in environmental communication scholarship (e.g., Lester, 2016; Miller, 2016). In the archives of the journal *Environmental Communication*, at the time of writing the term appeared in only two articles. “Environmental communication” refers to both pragmatic and constitutive symbolic action (Cox, 2013). In its pragmatic form, it provides information that can assist actors wishing to solve environmental problems; in its constitutive form, it may, for example, “invite us to perceive forests and rivers as natural resources for use or exploitation or as vital life support systems” (Cox, 2013, p. 19). During environmental conflicts, differing constructions of natural assets are likely to compete, as antagonists engage in “diagnostic and prognostic” framing struggles in their attempts to influence the way environmental problems are understood (Benford & Snow, 2000). For an organization on either side of the debate to credibly aspire to a social license from the local community, both the organization and its activities must be perceived as legitimate by that stakeholder (Morrison, 2014). If the local community is suspicious of an ENGO, ambivalent about its activities, or hostile to its ambitions, the ENGO’s legitimacy may be called into question.

Curran (2015) condenses the International Energy Agency’s seven “Golden Rules” of social license into three categories of legitimacy:

Social legitimacy, which includes transparency, accountability and effective community engagement measures; *environmental legitimacy*, which demands adequate studies and the disclosure and monitoring of chemicals, impacts on water quality and emissions; and *economic legitimacy*, which guarantees accurate information about, and sharing of, the economic benefits of gas projects. (p. 138, emphasis in original)

As explored extensively in the academic fields of environmental studies, environmental politics, and social movement studies, ENGOs are practiced in the pursuit of social legitimacy through community engagement and environmental legitimacy through appeals to science. Demonstrating their economic credentials and the financial benefits of their activities, however, may be both more

problematic—particularly for any environmentalists who consider continued economic growth unsustainable (Curran, 2015)—and, in regions traditionally dependent on the resources sector for employment, more strategically decisive in gaining local support (see Luke, 2002). The research presented in this article interrogates this underexamined aspect of ENGO discourse by investigating the way environmentalists and sympathetic tourism operators in case studies from two countries talk about tourism—an “attractive” industry that in “marginal locations” may be the only job-creating alternative to long-standing extractive production (Luke, 2002). In both case studies, environmentalists interviewed include nature photographers who have contributed their images and their activism to ENGOs and their causes, in recognition of the pivotal role of nature photography in constructing nature as desirable for tourists (see, e.g., McGaurr, 2016; Todd, 2010).

Background: Situating Social License

To understand how social license might be applied to ENGOs, it is helpful first to consider the relationship between sustainable development, corporate social responsibility, and ecological modernization. Sustainable-development discourse reassures us that “we *can* have it all: economic growth, environmental conservation, social justice, and not just for the moment, but in perpetuity. No painful changes are necessary” (Dryzek, 2013, p. 159, emphasis in original). According to Hajer and Fischer (1999), “in its most sophisticated form,” sustainable development has “facilitated aspects of ecological modernization” (p. 3), which is a policy-oriented discourse that stresses partnerships between “government, business, reform-oriented environmentalists and scientists” (Dryzek, 2013, p. 174). Curran (2015) conceives of sustainable development as both an objective of corporate social responsibility and an ambition of governments pursuing ecological modernization. Like sustainable development, ecological modernization conceptualizes the environment as a public good, characterizes environmental protection as a positive-sum game (Hajer, 1995), and takes “a ‘realist’ attitude towards market ideologies and dynamics which are hegemonic in the world” (Sonnenfeld, 2002, p. 2). For Curran (2015), “one way or another, [ecological modernization] is the dominant approach to environmental reform today” (p. 45). Ecological modernization differs from sustainable development in its conceptualization of environmental degradation partly as a structural problem that will be ameliorated by a reorganization of the economy in the course of modernization (Dryzek, 2013; Morrison, 2014). Ecological modernization’s advocacy of partnerships and more participatory policy making can include greater consultation with ENGOs willing to accommodate a societal commitment to continued economic growth and consider outcomes that are market-oriented as well as ecologically responsible (Hajer, 1995; Sonnenfeld, 2002). More speculatively, Hajer (1995), referencing Beck’s work on reflexive modernization, theorizes a stronger form of ecological modernization in which reflexivity may arise in part from the “introduction of dissident voices in established institutional routines which interrupts the routinized way of seeing in specific institutionalized realms” (p. 40). Reflexive ecological modernization considers the possibility of “transforming industrial society into a radically different and more environmentally defensible (but still capitalist) alternative” (Dryzek, 2013, p. 183).

Like sustainable development and ecological modernization, social license is highly contested, representing a struggle between “heterogeneous discourses—such as business, management, society, community, ethics and environment—in which power is played out and meaning is constantly reconstituted” (Parsons & Moffat, 2014, p. 342). Analysis of corporate social-license discourse

demonstrates how the openness of the concept can create opportunities for extractive industries to marginalize dissent, maintain existing power relations with local communities, and keep regulatory intervention to a minimum (Parsons et al., 2014). Yet there are those who argue against its utility to corporations in part on the basis of its discursive and material value to ENGOs (Burse, 2015; Newman, 2014). Just as some environmentalists feel that sustainable development has become little more than greenwashing—a public relations exercise rather than a source of substantive change—some corporate actors argue that the use value of social license as a voluntary incentive for industries to go beyond what is legally required has been degraded by ENGO deployment of the term in campaigns for greater regulation (see Curran, 2015). Nevertheless, the argument that corporations have a responsibility to protect local jobs (Curran, 2015) remains a potent defense against ENGO attempts to block extractive development. In these circumstances, publicizing the economic potential of tourism may be one of the few strategies available to ENGOs attempting to garner local support.

Reporting on their analysis of discourse and organizational networks between tourism and environmentalism, Mark Stoddart and Elahe Nezhadhossein (2016) find that discourse alignment between nature-based tourism and environmentalism in the Canadian Atlantic province of Newfoundland and Labrador has not been accompanied by productive organizational networks. By contrast, Luke (2002), discussing the transition from extractive to attractive industries in British Columbia's Clayoquot Sound, highlights the considerable publicity value of environmental campaigns for nature-based tourism in regional communities. A similar phenomenon has been evident in Tasmania since the environmental movement achieved a historic victory over the state government in the 1980s, when plans for a dam that would have flooded the wild Franklin River in the state's Wilderness World Heritage Area were overturned by the country's highest court (Lester, 2007; McGaurr, 2015). Turning defeat to Tasmania's economic advantage, the state government responded by framing tourism and environmental protection as compatible on the premise that making natural places accessible to tourists in a commercial, but sustainable fashion raises environmental awareness and money for the management of national parks and World Heritage Areas while creating jobs for residents of nearby communities, which in turn builds and maintains local support for conservation (McGaurr, 2015). Among its many advantages to the Tasmanian tourism sector, a government and industry discourse of "accessible nature" made the case for commercial nature-based tourism businesses seeking a social license to introduce tourists, visitor infrastructure, and transport to environmentally sensitive areas (McGaurr, 2015).

Nature-based tourism refers to any tourism that utilizes natural attractions, whereas ecotourism is generally understood to describe nature-based tourism that simultaneously helps "protect ecological and cultural resources of tourism sites, provide local economic opportunity and give travelers a greater environmental awareness" (Fallon & Kriwoken, 2003, p. 289). Critics of nature-based tourism point out that arguments in favor of even the most well-managed ecotourism activities typically overlook both their inevitable local ecological impacts and the cumulative environmental harm that the global tourism industry creates through, for example, the greenhouse gases emitted during long-haul air travel (Brockington, Duffy, & Igoe, 2008; Bulbeck, 2005; Carrier & Macleod, 2005). Even so, "the notion that tourism is a means to produce sustainable development and secure conservation of biodiversity constitutes the dominant orthodoxy" (Brockington et al., 2008, p. 136).

Methods

In qualitative research, case studies combine “experiential knowledge of the case and close attention to the influence of its social, political and other contexts” (Stake, 2005, p. 444) to generate “concrete, practical and context-driven knowledge” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 70). Case studies can help identify and explain occurrences that do not readily accord with established theory (Bradshaw & Wallace, 1991), while comparison of cases may enable scholars to better understand historical divergence (Ragin & Zaret, 1983). The research presented in this article compares cases from Canada and Australia—countries richly endowed with exportable natural resources and marketed internationally as tourism destinations with a wealth of natural attractions. Two cases are compared: (1) past and contemporary contestation over logging, mining, and wilderness use in Tasmania and (2) past forestry disputes in British Columbia’s Great Bear Rainforest and more recent conflict over oil-tanker traffic along its channels and coast that would have arisen if the proposed Enbridge Northern Gateway Pipeline had been constructed.

In the Tasmanian case, the region is defined as the island state (6.8 million hectares), of which about 20% is Wilderness World Heritage Area. In the British Columbia research, the region is defined as the Great Bear Rainforest (6.4 million hectares, of which about half (i.e., 80% of its forest) is now protected from industrial logging). Both regions experience high levels of unemployment and disadvantage and have traditionally relied heavily on extractive industries for their economic survival. Tasmania’s wilderness and the Great Bear Rainforest are important and geographically substantial natural tourism attractions. The value of the regions for comparative research has been recognized previously, with European geographer Affolderbach (2011) comparing them in her theorization of environmental bargaining.

Our article draws on fieldwork and interviews by the first author conducted in North America in mid-2015 (including on-site in the Great Bear Rainforest) and in Australia in 2015–2016. For McCracken (1988), as few as eight long interviews can be sufficient to yield scholarly insights. For the exploratory research presented here, the first author interviewed 12 people in Australia and North America who could bring a range of perspectives to the discussion of environmental communication and nature-based tourism in Tasmania and the Great Bear Rainforest. Participants were environmentalists (individuals who were current or former ENGO leaders and/or allied nature photographers) or members of the tourism sector.

The Australian interviews were conducted after a new Tasmanian government had repealed legislation supporting a forestry peace deal between several ENGOs and the forest industry (Warman, 2014) but also after ENGOs had successfully lobbied the World Heritage Committee to oppose the same government’s plan to open areas of the state’s Wilderness World Heritage Area to logging (“UN World Heritage Committee calls for major changes,” 2015; see Shannon, 2016). Also in the years of the interviews about Tasmania, environmentalists continued their efforts to have an area called takayna/Tarkine included in Tasmania’s Wilderness World Heritage Area (e.g., Wilderness Society, 2015b) while resisting government attempts to increase commercial tourism infrastructure in existing World Heritage wilderness (Morton, 2016; Wilderness Society, 2015c).

The North American interviews were conducted in the year before the enactment of the Great Bear Rainforest (Forest Management) Act—the culmination of more than a decade of negotiations between government, ENGOs, industry, and First Nations people, resulting in an agreement that Greenpeace and the province lauded as Canada’s “gift to the world” (British Columbia, n.d.b; Brooks in Morrow, 2016). Also in the year of the interviews about the Great Bear Rainforest, ENGOs were still fighting plans announced in 2006 for the construction of the Enbridge Northern Gateway Pipeline from the bituminous sands of Alberta to the west coast port of Kitimat on the basis that tanker traffic to international markets from the port through the Great Bear Rainforest would pose an unacceptable environmental risk. The pipeline proposal was rejected by Prime Minister Trudeau late in 2016 (Guly, 2016).

Text analysis of the transcribed interviews examined the way participants framed tourism in contested natural places. The conceptualization of framing employed in this article follows Anabela Carvalho, who refers to it as a “discursive intervention” (2008, p. 169) by which social actors attempt to achieve a particular outcome. For Carvalho, “the intervention and the procured aim can be more or less conscious” (p. 169). This is because, in her view,

Framing is not something that you choose to do or not, but a necessary operation in talking about reality. Therefore, what is at stake in the analysis of framing as a discursive strategy is how, and not whether, an actor frames reality. (Carvalho, 2008, p. 169)

Hajer (1995) associates frames with story lines, which he describes as “narratives on social reality through which elements from many different domains are combined and that provide actors with a set of symbolic references that suggest a common understanding” (p. 62). In the oft-quoted words of Entman (1993), “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (p. 52, original emphasis removed).

Results

Investing in Local Communities

In the Great Bear Rainforest and Tasmanian cases, an important feature of early collective-action framing by environmentalists was what Benford and Snow (2000) describe as frame diffusion. Through the deft combination of “strategic selection” and “strategic fitting,” environmentalists borrowed from Indigenous cultures of the regions to bestow new names on contested places—names that would resonate emotionally with movement members and prospective supporters but also with potential tourists.

Several activists in the Great Bear Rainforest and Tasmanian cases retrospectively framed their naming contests with industry and government elites as ENGO investment in tourism. The two participants quoted below began by highlighting the movement’s battle to have the new names adopted:

There was a time before we named it the Great Bear Rainforest when this place was called the Mid-coast Timber Supply Area and there was virtually no tourism up here at

all . . . so we came up with that name and then, you know, the government and industry spent so many years just trying to convince people that the place does not exist and that spirit bears do not exist and that it's all just made up by a bunch of environmentalists. (I. McAllister, personal communication, June 17, 2015)

"Tarkine" was a construct by [environmental activist and former Greens politician] Bob [Brown] trying to draw in on Aboriginal heritage but give a place an identity and a name. And you know, it was resisted for a decade. (V. Bayley, personal communication, December 14, 2015)

The environmentalists then foregrounded the return or potential return on that investment to tourism:

I think that in a lot of tourism markets, the Great Bear Rainforest has actually become one of the top destinations in the world now to go and see wildlife. (I. McAllister, personal communication, June 17, 2015)

But now it's embraced . . . and the [jurisdictional tourism authority's] Tarkine Tourism Strategy was great from our perspective. It was a model of what can and should be done, including around World Heritage. (V. Bayley, personal communication, December 14, 2015)

NGOs in Tasmania already had a long history of naming contests with government over the movement's deployment of the term *wilderness* during environmental conflicts. Although the tourism sector was an early adopter of "wilderness" as a brand attribute for the entire state (McGaurr, 2015; McGaurr, Tranter, & Lester, 2015), government and the forest industry recognized its symbolic power in local environmental contestation and for a period attempted to hamper its circulation in news media, hoping thereby to reduce its political salience (Lester, 2006, 2007; McGaurr, et al., 2015). In the current study, a tourism operator discussing state bureaucrats' early opposition to the name *Tarkine* positioned Tasmanian government elites then as authoritarian and the publicly funded Tourism Tasmania as embattled, implicitly counterposing advocacy ecotourism operators as defenders of the tourism sector's best interests (R. Fairlie, personal communication, September 2, 2015).

NGO frame diffusion tactics could also incorporate their renaming of wildlife, as demonstrated in resistance to environmentalists' dissemination of the term *spirit bear* to refer to the Kermode bear. Spirit bears, which are rare, but most concentrated in the Great Bear Rainforest, are not albinos but black bears with a genetic trait that gives them a white coat. In the words of the founder of the former Spirit Bear Youth Coalition, Simon Jackson, "It was always known as a part of the First Nation legends, and so their word, *moksgm'ol*, loosely means spirit bear" (personal communication, April 24, 2015). The desire of different activists to associate the popularization of the Kermode bear as "spirit bear" with their own campaigns illustrates the high degree of importance NGO leaders attribute to their investment in naming contests. Jackson attributed the renaming to 1990s antilogging campaigns in which his organization was influential (S. Jackson, personal communication, April 24, 2015). By contrast, founder and former president of Washington, DC-based NGO the International League of Conservation Photographers, Cristina Mittermeier, associated

the symbolic value of the animal with later opposition to the Enbridge pipeline—a campaign in which the International League of Conservation Photographers participated in 2010 in association with the Gitga'at First Nations, the National Geographic Society, Pacific Wild, other ENGOs, and tourism operation King Pacific Lodge. As part of this campaign, the League brought a host of its member to the forest for a news media event they called a Rapid Assessment Visual Expedition, in which the photographers themselves were also filmed for a feature-length documentary about their activism called *Spoil* (Jennings, 2011; see McGaurr, 2016).

As renamed places and animals gained recognition, advocacy ecotourism businesses arose, simultaneously capitalizing on ENGO public relations success and adding to the circulation of the new names through their own tourism marketing and public relations. In the Great Bear Rainforest, Indigenous-owned tourism business Spirit Bear Lodge opened in 2002, promoting spirit bear conservation and the Kitasoo/Xaixais people's "unique perspective on their home" (T. McGrady, personal communication, June 13, 2015). In Tasmania, Tiger Trails was founded with the specific intention of assisting the protracted campaign to protect the Tarkine, and its operators soon saw strategic advantage in relaunching the business as Tarkine Trails (R. Fairlie, personal communication, September 2, 2015). In both the Great Bear Rainforest and Tasmania, the perceived value of activist renaming for subsequent ENGO frame diffusion via the tourism sector was evident in the talk of study participants working for these businesses:

2010–2011 was when we started making very aggressive moves in the international travel trade promoting our business, and I think we've really tried to spread the word because we realized that many, many people on the planet, in Australia, UK, knew lots about bears but didn't know about this very special animal. And then environment groups of course are using it as a bit of a mascot to promote their causes and promote the Great Bear Rainforest as a place worthy of protecting. (T. McGrady, personal communication, June 13, 2015)

There were constantly people who came on walks with us who were totally sold on what we were trying to do. They were like, "This is an amazing idea, saving the Tarkine through tourism, it's such a great idea, we love what you're trying to do, how can we help?" (R. Fairlie, personal communication, September 2, 2015)

Nevertheless, in both case studies, participants in the commercial tourism sector who were opposed to forestry, mining, or pipelines in certain areas were circumspect in the way they made their own opposition public and discussed their engagement with ENGOs (G. Irons, personal communication, July 10, 2015; T. McGrady, personal communication, June 13, 2015). And other challenges were noted in Tasmania, such as the complexity of navigating a path among ENGOs with differing views of how much tourism should be permitted in protected areas:

The really hard-core, idealistic environmentalists, they certainly wouldn't agree with having any built structures in any of the wilderness areas, so these high-end walks wouldn't exist if that end of the environment movement had their way. (R. Fairlie, personal communication, September 2, 2015)

Despite the challenges, in the Great Bear Rainforest antilogging campaign and in Tasmania, ENGO persistence and the support of some in the tourism sector led eventually to incorporation of the environmental movement's preferred place and wildlife names into the official government lexicon and publicly funded tourism marketing. For environmentalists who had been involved in Great Bear Rainforest campaigns, the tourism returns for local communities already living in the rainforest were prominent talking points:

Everyone knows about it and everyone wants to go there. I think people are realizing that if we do anything to screw this up for the bear we will lose our golden goose, and certainly the communities are feeling that way. (S. Jackson, personal communication, April 24, 2015)

When we talk about the Great Bear Rainforest you're looking at a place that right now has 40,000 jobs in fishing and tourism, and the government of Stephen Harper keeps promising that there's going to be 5,000 jobs in this pipeline. Who cares? (C. Mittermeier, personal communication, July 8, 2015)

In Tasmania to date, however, popularization of the word *Tarkine* through activism and tourism has not been accompanied by a significant increase in Aboriginal-owned or -operated tourism businesses. In addition, there has often been heated debate between ENGOs and Aboriginal groups concerned that environmentalist framing of World Heritage wilderness as pristine denies recognition of past Aboriginal occupation of the areas (Pickerill, 2008). In response, the Wilderness Society and the Bob Brown Foundation have substantially increased their Indigenous engagement in Tasmania in recent years (McGaurr, Tranter, & Lester, 2016).

In the Great Bear Rainforest case, potential tourism pressure on protected areas was discussed by McAllister and Jackson as an important concern. However, perhaps because the rainforest itself was still occupied by First Nations people (unlike the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, which did not incorporate contemporary Aboriginal built communities), their talk ultimately returned to tourism's advantages as a form of environmental communication:

Where we need to be careful though, is in those places that are actual roadless wilderness places like Spirit Bear [i.e., the Great Bear Rainforest] and Katmai and real wild, wild spaces, is that we don't then turn them into Yellowstone or Banff. . . . But I think for all of the ills of tourism, we need to remember the importance of getting people to have the experiences so they have the ability to tell their stories, because that's how you get people to care about nature I think. (S. Jackson, personal communication, April 24, 2015)

So we haven't really seen large industrial sort of style tourism occur here yet. There's places where it's starting to be a real issue and human impact on bears and other sensitive species is occurring, but by and large I think it's been a really good relationship between ourselves. (I. McAllister, personal communication, June 17, 2015)

For the Wilderness Society's Tasmanian campaign manager Bayley, ecotourism was good local business and good environmental communication if it contributed to protection and constrained demand for "inappropriate" development. Referring to 2015 Wilderness Society guides to the Styx Valley (once contested, but now included in the Wilderness World Heritage Area) that give visitors information about places to stay and eat outside the protected area, he noted:

Instead of [visitors] just dropping it now that it is protected and moving onto somewhere else, [we're] kind of consolidating that, working with Parks to try to formalize some of that and actually get people in so that there are genuine shifts and improvements in the local economy with the local tourism businesses. And then hopefully that starts to ripple out that, number one, protection works, but number two, you don't need helicopters and huts to be able to experience World Heritage. (V. Bayley, personal communication, December 14, 2015)

Of Images and Brands

In both the Great Bear Rainforest and Tasmanian cases, activism framed as ENGO investment in tourism included image-heavy communications that performed multiple roles of environmental advocacy, scope enlargement, and tourism promotion, nationalizing and transnationalizing environmental debates by speaking to domestic and international tourists. Importantly in terms of ENGOs' framing of themselves as contributing to tourism promotion, ENGO communications that reached tourists on the ground also had the potential to increase tourism by raising awareness of the destination among potential visitors through word of mouth or gifts that the tourists took home. Products sold directly into foreign markets could also be argued to raise the profile of both the issue and the destination internationally. Among the most notable of these were coffee-table books distributed through galleries, bookshops, tourism outlets, and international online retailers such as Amazon.

Study participants McAllister and Blakers had come to nature photography through their own activism. Whereas McAllister combined the roles of photographer and executive director of the ENGO Pacific Wild, Blakers became a professional photographer after working for ENGOs, and he retained a strong association with them. For Blakers, photography, advocacy, and tourism were inextricably linked, and he regarded a prominent gallery he co-owned in the main tourism precinct of Tasmania's capital, Hobart, as "a tourism thing but it's also a political thing" (personal communication, August 6, 2015). In 2003, he had participated in a weeklong photographic event with more than 40 other photographers, resulting in the coffee-table book *Tarkine* (Ashton, 2010), which included text from prominent environmentalists advocating protection. First published with the assistance of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) in 2004 at the height of intense conflict, it was republished in 2010, during a battle for the area to be heritage-listed, and was still available in Blakers's gallery in 2015—the year the Wilderness Society lobbied the World Heritage Committee to include takayna/Tarkine in the Wilderness World Heritage Area.

In the Great Bear Rainforest, McAllister compiled his photographs in a succession of books, including *The Great Bear Rainforest* (McAllister & McAllister, 1997) and *Great Bear Wild* (McAllister, 2014), both with forewords by Robert F. Kennedy Jr. supporting McAllister's causes. For McAllister (personal

communication, June 24, 2015), whose books featured many photographs of spirit bears, "Each of the books that I have done on the Great Bear have been published in the U.S. and abroad, so trying to bring in internationally recognized names like Robert Kennedy helps." In 2006, the spirit bear became British Columbia's "provincial mammal" (British Columbia, n.d.a) and, consequently, a prominent feature of its tourism marketing and branding.

Other image-heavy communications produced by ENGOs and allied photographers that functioned as both environmental advocacy and tourism promotion included posters, prints, calendars, cards, websites, social media, guidebooks, and self-drive tour guides. Individual photographs that featured in environmental advocacy publications also sometimes appeared in government tourism promotions (McGaurr, 2015, 2016). In addition, documentaries about activist events in which nature photographers including McAllister and Blakers had participated—*Spoil* (Jennings, 2011) and *Tarkine in Motion* (Broun, 2015), respectively—were screened in cinemas, and the events also incorporated touring exhibitions.

The framing of nature photography as a tourism asset was exceptionally strong in relation to the Tasmanian case. Not only did the Tasmanian Blakers foreground the political power of celebratory nature photography encountered by tourists, but the North American Mittermeier framed Tasmanian nature photographers Olegas Truchanas and Peter Dombrovskis as groundbreakers in constructing environmental advocacy and tourism as complementary. Indeed, Mittermeier's own experience may be seen as evidence of the transnational flow of ENGO *practice* (as well as advocacy and activism) through tourism. In her interview, she recounted how she had first come to realize the potential of nature photography for environmental communication and activism while traveling in Tasmania as a tourist and coming upon the late Dombrovskis's work in gift shops (C. Mittermeier, personal communication, July 8, 2015; see also Mittermeier, 2005). So inspired was Mittermeier by the Tasmanian's work that when she founded the International League of Conservation Photographers in Washington, DC, he was made an honorary fellow.

For McAllister, Pacific Wild's "natural history documentation" of the Great Bear Rainforest also had a public-good payoff: "trying to inspire people about the beauty of this area and the amazing wildlife and all of those things and that certainly, in turn, increases tourism" (I. McAllister, personal communication, June 17, 2015). The inspirational value of McAllister's publications was evident in the talk of Tim McGrady (personal communication, June 13, 2015)—general manager of Spirit Bear Lodge at the time of our interview—who recalled how the book *Great Bear Rainforest* "really captured my imagination, and I knew eventually at some point I would end up here." Mittermeier (personal communication, July 8, 2015) also dwelt on the potential of images of charismatic animals such as spirit bears to attract both tourists and concern (see McGaurr, 2016).

The relationship between nature photography and the economic benefits of place branding was strongly evident in the Tasmanian case:

Imagery and bringing back imagery of wilderness areas has been really important as, well, just to I guess reinforce the mystique and the—you know—the mystery of wilderness and wilderness areas. And I think that's a big part of Tassie's broader kind of

branding and positioning in the world. (V. Bayley, personal communication, December 14, 2015)

For Bayley, however, “wilderness is more than just a brand that you can put on a hotel or a cruise; it’s something that can be defined and it’s something that can be mapped” (personal communication, July 27, 2015). In his view, the government would undermine the ecological integrity of World Heritage wilderness if it opened it up for increased commercial tourism such as proposed helicopter flights and luxury wilderness accommodation (V. Bayley, personal communication, July 27, 2015). When Ecotourism Australia’s chief executive officer was interviewed for this study, he represented national parks all over Australia as having undergone a profound shift over the previous 15 years from seeing tourists as “a nuisance” to regarding tourism as a source of “real benefits . . . from a revenue point of view, from a messaging point of view, from increasing visitation, from managing visitation—all these benefits, they get it” (R. Hillman, personal communication July 24, 2015). But in Tasmania, a charge of trying to lock up protected areas or lock out people was frequently leveled at ENGOs by the broader Tasmanian tourism industry. When substantial new tourism infrastructure was opened in the Tasman National Park in December 2015 to attract paying bushwalkers, Blakers’s photographs of the buildings contributed to an ENGO presentation to UNESCO opposing government efforts to allow more hut-based commercial ecotourism in World Heritage wilderness (Beniuk, 2015). The following year, the complexity of the social license message in regard to tourism was acknowledged by another nationally renowned ENGO leader and former Greens politician, Bob Brown, when he proposed a walk through takayna/Tarkine that would require the construction of “campsites with elevated tent platforms and toilets, and several large bridges” (Morton, 2016, para. 15):

It fits into the ideas of the bigger parties that a place like the Tarkine needs to have economic and employment opportunities for the region. . . . Ideally we’d want to have the Tarkine protected for its wilderness values, and this will have an impact on those values, but otherwise it’s death by a thousand cuts with mining and logging. (Brown in Morton, 2016, paras. 4–5).

Even so, a month later, at the annual Cradle Coast Tourism Forum encompassing takayna/Tarkine, a prominent developer and owner of high-end nature-based tourism products called for environmentalists to rethink their stance on tourism in the wilderness, describing them as “the anti-everything brigade” (Currant in Bermingham 2016, p. 4).

For Bayley, the idea that ENGO deployment of tourism might function as a social license for the Wilderness Society was novel and fraught. As the leader of an organization born of environmental contestation characterized by groundbreaking and historic conflicts with government energy producers and forest managers, he represented commercial tourism in protected wilderness as the latest in a succession of enterprises receiving government support for projects that the Wilderness Society argued would diminish environmental values: “The land use debates in Tassie and the public debate that sort of follows them has been the hydro, it’s been forestry, and it now looks like it’s tourism, and they’re all following really similar models” (V. Bayley, personal communication, December 14, 2015). Nevertheless, after he had described the style of tourism promoted by the Wilderness Society in its Styx Valley visitor

guides (Wilderness Society, 2015a, 2015d), he was prepared to consider the deployment of a very particular kind of tourism as “bolstering the social license of protecting places” by demonstrating that economic benefits could accrue to local communities from tourists visiting parts of the World Heritage Area without the need for commercial infrastructure in protected wilderness (V. Bayley, personal communication, December 14, 2015).

In Canada, the term *social license* was uttered frequently in the talk of one-time Great Bear Rainforest activist Jackson, on one occasion encompassing tourism:

By getting them out into parks that are [already] road accessible . . . there’s the opportunity to get more people to understand the ideas, the ideals of protecting and conserving wild spaces. If you can do that, then you get social license to protect places like Spirit Bear [i.e., the Great Bear Rainforest] more readily. (S. Jackson, personal communication, April 24, 2015)

It was also in Canada, however, that we encountered the strongest expression of nature-based tourism’s perceived utility for facilitating framing of tourism and extractive industries as compatible, from a tourism-sector interviewee who had formerly been highly placed in the national tourism organization (G. Klassen, personal communication, June 18, 2015).

Discussion

The pilot study presented in this article demonstrates that the way environmentalists and ecotourism operators with ENGO sympathies deploy tourism in their talk about natural tourism destinations where environmental conflict is extensive bears many of the hallmarks of social license framing aimed at building economic legitimacy, but the extent of this alignment is influenced by the demographics and history of the places concerned. Comparison of our case studies suggests a long, complex, nuanced, and occasionally fraught relationship between environmentalism and tourism in Tasmania, and a more optimistic instrumental relationship in the Great Bear Rainforest. In both case studies, environmentalists and supportive ecotourism operators were keen to articulate the economic benefits to local communities of nature-based tourism resulting from environmental protection. Speaking about the Great Bear Rainforest, where Indigenous communities live and work today, ENGOs framed tourism jobs as a local community return on the investment of their activism—a means to environmentally sustainable reform and development. This occurred in Tasmania, too, but in that state, where local communities of interest live outside the boundaries of the Wilderness World Heritage Area, any attempt by the Wilderness Society to use tourism to, in effect, earn a social license from local communities for protection was only feasible to a point.

In the Background section of this article, we noted that the framing processes that Hajer (1995) refers to as story lines may combine discursive elements from different domains to suggest a common understanding among actors who have traditionally positioned themselves according to widely different discourses. Our study identified three prominent story lines about ENGOs and tourism:

1. ENGO actions that lead to the protection of natural places create opportunities for ecotourism, which is a business model capable of achieving a sustainable balance within the societal and ecological boundaries of a region (see Hajer et. al., 2015), unlike extractive industries.
2. ENGO activity contributes to place branding, which is economically advantageous to the region. The brand benefits from (a) the national and transnational flow of environmentalists' images of natural beauty and (b) the endorsement of domestic and international tourists who have only been able to enjoy remarkable natural attractions because ENGOs have succeeded in winning their protection.
3. Tourism infrastructure and transport can degrade wilderness values, which ENGOs must defend.

In our analysis, story lines 1 and 2 combine multiple elements of environmentalism and tourism discourses, thereby facilitating "discourse coalitions" (Hajer, 1995) between ENGOs, tourism operators, and other stakeholders. These story lines are closely aligned with theories of ecological modernization and social license. They frame ENGOs as economically legitimate organizations comfortable with modernity whose activities are an investment in tourism that benefits local communities. Story line 3 contains few symbolic references from tourism discourse, elevating "wilderness values" above wilderness's "brand value." It speaks to publics at multiple scales by constructing wilderness as, for example, "remote at its core from points of mechanized access and other evidence of colonial and modern technological society" (Parks and Wildlife Service, in Wilderness Society, 2015c, p. 12). In this story line, the promises of ecological modernization may be unrealizable, because even when the economy is restructured to favor industries that are environmentally friendly, the ecological dimension of sustainability is still likely to be subordinated to its political-economic dimension (see Hannigan, 2014, p. 40).

In the Great Bear Rainforest case, story line 3 was evident, but the first two story lines were more prominent. Here, according to Affolderbach (2011), ENGOs had been able to work collaboratively with other stakeholders to resolve much of the forestry dispute. This resulted in an agreement incorporating "ecosystem-based management," which aims to "have fully functional and intact ecosystems while ensuring residents can continue to work and make a living in the area . . . [an approach] based in science as well as traditional and local knowledge" (British Columbia, n.d.b, para. 2). Indigenous tourism was recognized in these negotiations as an important source of income for First Nations people in the region. This may account in part for the prominence of story lines 1 and 2 in environmentalists' discourse during the dispute over the Enbridge Northern Gateway Pipeline. ENGOs needed to nurture their alliances with those First Nations who opposed the pipeline, because the risk of oil spills damaging First Nations' livelihoods was an important feature of the antipipeline campaign (see Jennings, 2011).

In the Tasmanian case, oscillation between the first two story lines and the third was more pronounced. Here, early attempts at resolving forestry disputes had been less collaborative than the Great Bear Rainforest negotiations, according to Affolderbach (2011), and when a collaborative approach had finally been attempted, the resolution achieved was soon dismantled by a new state government

(Warman, 2014). Although environmentalists' framing of tourism outside wilderness areas could be theorized as an attempt to demonstrate the economic legitimacy necessary for ENGOs to gain a social license from local communities, when proposals were announced for increased commercial tourism infrastructure in World Heritage wilderness, tourism was framed by some environmentalists as enmeshed in a growth economy and political system incapable of respecting and protecting wilderness values. This appeared to strain several ENGO alliances and discourse coalitions: Differing views of tourism in wilderness areas were evident among environmentalists and also between environmentalists seeking to preserve wilderness values and ecotourism operators with strong environmental sympathies who nevertheless needed to make a living from their operations. Elsewhere, tourism development in a national park exposed tensions between the dual roles of environmentalists whose photographs had helped build national and international support for protection while also contributing to branding and marketing of the state as a nature-based tourism destination. And although an understanding was eventually reached between some Tasmanian Aboriginal and ENGO actors that environmentalists' advocacy of wilderness values was not an attempt to deny historical Aboriginal occupation of the World Heritage Area, deployment of Aboriginal names in ENGO campaigns has not yet been accompanied by the growth of a strong Aboriginal tourism sector.

In his analysis of the issue of acid rain in Europe in the 1980s, Hajer (1995) found European environmentalists' choice of ecological modernization was an attempt to be seen by government as "the right kind of people, as realistic, responsible, and professional, avoiding being positioned as romantic dreamers" (p. 102). The result was that "by the mere choice of vocabulary the social movements effectively restricted their own possibilities of arguing their moral case" (p. 103). Nature-based tourism, and particularly ecotourism, unites the sustainable-development discourses of government and industry. As such, story lines of environmental protection as an investment in tourism and local communities can be used by ENGOs as shorthand in their efforts to pull the market-driven discourse of corporate social responsibility toward the reformatory promise of ecological modernization. As Hajer reminds us, "the key function of story-lines is that they suggest unity in the bewildering variety of separate discursive component parts of a problem" (p. 56). Tourism allows an environmentalist "to illustrate where his or her work fits into the jigsaw" (p. 63). But in cases where the ENGO can only support some forms of tourism in some locations, demonstrating the legitimacy of both the organization and all its activities to local communities while maintaining faith with a geographically dispersed support base is likely to be challenging.

Conclusion

Just as sustainable development began as a discourse for and of civil society, but was embraced by corporations for its reputational promise, so social license emerged in the resources sector as a response to community resistance but is now part of the armory that ENGOs deploy against extractive industries. On one side, claims of corporate social responsibility via sustainable development risk being dismissed by ENGOs as greenwashing; on the other, ENGOs opposed to developments can be asked by their adversaries to demonstrate their own social license. The challenge for ENGOs who may conceptualize nature-based tourism as a social license to protect is finding a way to reconcile its strategic advantages at the local scale with national and transnational strategies for bringing pressure to bear on pro-development

interests and governments (Lester, 2016) on occasions when the interests in question are powerful tourism enterprises.

If establishing the legitimacy of both the organization and its actions is a necessary precondition for earning a social license (Morrison, 2014), finding evidence that activist ENGOs frame “appropriate” tourism as a social license for protection is only one step in understanding the communicative affordances and possible pitfalls of self-referential social license discourse for ENGOs. The study reported in this article is exploratory and the number of interviewees relatively small. Even so, the similarities and variations between the cases considered suggest there is much practical and theoretical value to be gained from further research into ENGOs and social license in communications disciplines. Related to this, closer consideration of reflexivity, or lack thereof, in the circulation of social license frames among ENGOs and the nature-based tourism sector during environmental conflicts has the potential to inform ecological modernization theory. Further attention to social license in the examination of discourse coalitions between Indigenous groups and ENGOs in contested natural places may also yield important theoretical insights.

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