Toward an Ethnography of Mobile Tourism Industry Workers in Banff National Park

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Abstract: While there is much anthropological literature concerning transnational mobility and identity of migrants and refugees, tourists and even entrepreneurs, less explored is the great complexity of the many different factions within mobile worker communities of resort destinations. If it is unexpected that these tourism workers are understudied, it is even more surprising given that they are key agents in (re)producing the identity and character of the place, which they then "sell" to tourists. At the same time, the identity of tourism workers is profoundly shaped by their experiences. This article examines approaches for studying the experiences of travel, work and life in Banff National Park.

Keywords: mobile tourism workers, travel/work experience, young adult, Banff

Résumé : Les questions de la mobilité internationale et de l'identité des migrants, des réfugiés, des touristes et même des entrepreneurs, sont abondamment couvertes dans la littérature anthropologique. Par contre, celle de la complexité des différents groupes composant les communautés de travailleurs nomades dans les destinations touristiques est peu étudiée. Il peut sembler inattendu que ces travailleurs du tourisme soient peu étudiés, mais cela l'est d'autant plus du fait que ceux-ci sont des agents-clés dans la (re)production de l'identité et du caractère d'un lieu, qu'ils ont pour mandat de « vendre » aux touristes. Par ailleurs, l'identité des travailleurs du tourisme est profondément façonnée par leurs expériences. Cet article recense diverses approches pour étudier les expériences de voyage, de travail, et de vie dans le parc national de Banff.

Mots-clés : travailleurs mobiles du tourisme, expériences de voyage/travail, jeunes adultes, Banff

Introduction

There was a general buzz of chatter in the room as some 70 young adults quickly found chairs. This was the Banff Ambassador Information presentation offered by Banff Heritage Tourism (a unit of Banff Lake Louise Tourism) in conjunction with Banff Parks Canada and the Town of Banff. The presentation specifically targets new staff working in the Banff tourism industry. The presenter raised her arms and welcomed all: "Everyone in this room is now a local!!" Indeed, the program's stated goals are to help "new residents to Banff discover how they can become knowledgeable 'locals' and share the uniqueness of this place with visitors" (Banff and Lake Louise Tourism 2012). This very notion of how youth workers in the tourism industry, as non-local "outsiders," help to shape and represent the identity of the place of Banff was to be the focus of our research concerned with heritage and mobility.

While a fascinating topic in itself, during the course of our first stage of study, we quickly became aware of significant assumptions and misconceptions about the identities and experiences of these young, mobile tourism workers in Banff who are the backbone of the tourist industry, and thus the livelihood of the Banff community. They are vital to the maintenance and perpetuation of Banff as an iconic Canadian destination place. Yet the lives of mobile workers are overlooked and subject to assumptions in the tourism industry and mainstream public. Furthermore, mobile tourism workers are academically understudied. While the theme of mobility, as linked to issues of place and identity, has received significant attention in anthropological literature, mobile tourism workers have largely gone unnoticed in these studies. In this research, we examine the dynamic nature of what it means to be a tourism worker in the town of Banff. Although they may be welcomed in the information session as "locals," their experiences and role within the town and the tourism industry suggest a much more complex, problematic relationship and situation. What

we have found is that, despite economic prosperity built, in large part, from a successful tourism industry that caters to the privileged, for these mobile tourism workers, Banff is also home to many underlying social problems and issues.

Funded by a small research "SEED" grant from the University of Northern British Columbia, we undertook initial research concerning mobile tourism workers in Banff. This prepared us for beginning a multiple-year research project that focuses on the experiences of travel, work and transient living of mobile tourism workers in the destination resorts of the Rocky Mountains in Western Canada and is part of a larger national research study on mobility and employment across Canada funded by a partnership grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

In this article, we focus on those mobile tourism workers who seek to travel to and experience work in the town of Banff. First, we set the study within the context of mobility studies, particularly within the studies of tourism and tourism labour, and offer suggestions to explain why mobile tourism workers have often gone understudied within the framework of mobility research. Next, we describe the context of the Banff case study, briefly giving the historical background of the park and outlining the unique demographics of life in the town. Following this, we define the methods and objectives of our study and work in the tourism industry and end by highlighting some significant aspects of our findings, including some of the key issues and problems facing mobile tourism workers in Banff.

Mobility: Incorporating Tourism Workers

The theme of mobility, as linked to issues of place and identity, has received significant attention in anthropological literature. Sheller and Urry (2006:207) write that

> all the world seems to be on the move. Asylum seekers, international students, terrorists, members of diasporas, holidaymakers, business people, sports stars, refugees, backpackers, commuters, the early retired, young mobile professionals, prostitutes, armed forces— these and many others fill the world's airports, buses, ships and trains. The scale of this travelling is immense.

In an ever-increasingly globalized world, where the flow of goods, services and people moving across permeable social, political and economic borders is the pattern of everyday life, it is not surprising that theories of mobility have become more and more prevalent in the anthropological discourse (Burns and Novelli 2008; Cresswell 2002; Duncan et al. 2009; Hall 2005; Uriely and Reichel 2000; Urry 2007). These discussions are fundamentally linked to exploring and understanding identity and place: the shifting and transforming identities of people moving between places and the impact that such uprootedness has on the shape and character of places. Much of the anthropological literature concerns transnational mobility and identity of migrants and refugees, tourists and even entrepreneurs (Burns and Novelli 2008; Castles and Davidson 2000; Castles and Miller 2009; Clifford 1994; Lindquist 2009; Nordstrom 2007; Sassen 1988, 2000). These mobility studies often focus on cultural contact and hybridity as actors and agents from multiple societies bring together networks, activities and patterns of life of both their home and host societies (Glick-Schiller et al. 1992). While this literature is rich, surprisingly, there has been much less focus on mobile tourism workers and even less from an anthropological perspective.

There is interdisciplinary work in sociology, geography and tourism studies that articulates various theories of tourism labour. Early on, Britton's seminal work (1991) argued for understanding tourism as a capitalist enterprise that works to create social meaning in place. Britton's focus on the political economy of tourism saw tourism labour as part of the production of the system of tourism, stating that "the position of labour in the supply of many final demand tourism products is unusual in that workers are simultaneously providers of labour services and [in terms of the "quality of service"] part of the consumed product" (1991:458). However, by fixing on labour markets in their place of residence, what Britton misses is the inherent flexibility and mobility of tourism workers. This is better addressed by Urry (2002:70–73) and Shaw and Williams (2002:171–187), making use of the model of four forms of labour flexibility (Atkinson et al. 1984), and by Williams and Hall (2002) in their discussion of "tourism, migration, circulation and mobility." In their ethnographic research, "Paradise Laborers: Hotel Work in the Global Economy," Adler and Adler (2004) examine the range and diversity of immigrant, transient and local tourism workers.

The category of tourism workers that has had the least academic attention is the more mobile seasonal and transient workers. This is especially the case for those working in Canada. Mobile tourism workers are an essential key to the success of the tourism industry in Canada and, yet, are largely invisible in current anthropological discussions. This is particularly surprising, considering the tourism industry in Canada accounted for 1.6 million jobs (9.2 per cent of all jobs in Canada), where non-Canadian-born workers carry out approximately 50 per cent of those jobs (Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council 2008).

That mobile tourism workers are so understudied can be explained by a variety of reasons. One possibility is that youth culture, in general, is largely understudied in anthropology. It is not new that youth and young adults have been chronically under-represented in anthropological research; they have been perceived as merely passing through this stage of life and so are "unfinished adults," not fully cultural agents in their own right. While that perception is changing in some spheres, young adults as transient workers in the tourism industry are still under-explored (Amit-Talai 2001; Amit-Talai and Wulff 1995). The majority of tourism workers in Banff are between the ages of 16 and 35,[1] with younger workers (between the ages of 15 and 24) accounting for one-third of the tourism labour force in Alberta (Government of Canada Sector Council Program 2006). They are considered to be transient and temporary—perhaps all the more transient because of their youthfulness. However, focusing on these young adults allows for a better understanding of the experiences embedded in transformative identity building.

Second, the fact that these young adults are "transient" may be another reason why they have been understudied as a group in anthropological literature. Ethnography traditionally has been defined by location and by a clearly distinguishable group. And while there are examples of ethnographies of more mobile and "un-territorialized" communities, they are not the norm. Perhaps the closest analogy to the study of mobile tourism workers is the research of backpacker tourists, with whom there are some useful comparisons—their transiency and impermanence, as well as the great heterogeneity of the category—and some key differences, including length of stay and the number of destinations (Sørensen 2003:849; Wilson and Richards 2004). A further significant difference is that mobile tourism workers are fundamentally defined by the interconnection between their travel and work experience (Riley 1988; Uriely and Reichel 2000). Nonetheless, focusing on transient and temporary groups is unusual in anthropology and their mobility makes for a challenging ethnographic task. Despite this or, perhaps, because of this, mobile tourism workers ought to be the focus of ethnographic research, especially for those interested in human mobility.

A third possible explanation for being understudied is that they are part of a presumed privileged group (because of their age and social class) and that these young workers are "transient by choice." Such a choice may be considered a "privilege" of their age but also of their social class. Anthropological research tends to under-represent what some may deem as privileged social groups. Experience and observation within the tourism

worker community provide a contrary perspective to what is often classified as "privileged youth, just having a good time." Upon closer investigation, tourism workers are from a variety of social classes and communities, including many middle-lower income-earning families and temporary foreign workers from a range of economic backgrounds. Studies such as George Gmelch's *Behind the Smile: the Working Lives of Caribbean Tourism* (2003) suggest that these stereotypes mask the dynamic and complex experiences of tourism workers and, therefore, top-down studies become blind to potential underlying social issues and community problems.

Finally, the location of these workers in an idealized and seemingly utopic site is equally under-represented. Workers and tourists alike are attracted to the pervasive narratives that encompass Canadian natural heritage. A popular online brochure states,

> Whenever Canada is mentioned, one of the first places that springs to mind is Banff. The soaring peaks, dense coniferous forests and abundant wildlife in one stunning region make it a Canadian institution. [YahooTravel.com 2012]

Research commonly overlooks places and experiences that are usually represented by idealized and romantic language. There has been a tendency in anthropology to focus on places on the margins rather than places perceived as idyllic and privileged. Yet there are critical social issues associated even with holiday destination sites. Tourism workers are well examined in global tourism studies, such as Darcie Vandegrift's "This Isn't Paradise— I Work Here" (2008), and given their essential role in the tourism industry in Canada, there is a real need to examine the context, work and lives of tourism workers in Canada.

It is this intersection of youthfulness, transience, privilege and place that makes Banff, Alberta, an excellent case study for understanding the lives of mobile tourism workers. In the next section, we outline the historic, geographic, political and demographic context of Banff to provide the background to our case study.

Background to Banff Case Study

Following a model already firmly established in American parks, such as Yosemite and Yellowstone, Banff is Canada's first national park, created in 1885 by an Order in Council (Armstrong et al. 2009; Campbell 2011a; Marsh 1983). At the encouragement of the vice-president of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), federal land agent William Pearce set aside a section of the Bow Valley from private ownership (Campbell 2011b). Pearce designated several small sections of land that contained

"several hot mineral springs which promise[d] to be of great sanitary advantage to the public" (Armstrong et al. 2009:274). Centred on these natural hot springs, Pearce felt, with some infrastructure, that Banff could "be one of the finest parks in the world" (Armstrong et al. 2009:274). In 1887, by an act of parliament, the Rocky Mountain National Park reserved a 674-km² rectangle around what shortly after became a spa. The CPR commissioned a New York architect to design a luxury hotel, and the park's fame spread shortly thereafter. By the early 20th century, the CPR brought in Swiss guides to climb and name the many mountain peaks. Viewing platforms, interpretive centres and outdoor tours were subsequently established in the park. While "wilderness" is Banff's iconic tourist attraction, Banff undoubtedly represents a manufactured wilderness destination.[2]

The initial establishment of Banff National Park was motivated by economic development values—to be the "greatest and most successful health resort on the continent"—rather than by ecological/wilderness conservation principles (McNamee 2002). Initially, parks could not prevent natural resource exploitation (Bella 1987) and timber cutting and mineral development were facilitated through the early parks. There were early concerns over the preservation of the park's ecosystems, but the dominant ideology driving the establishment of the park was primarily its monetary value through tourism (McNamee 2002). In the late 19th century, the railroad companies encouraged the creation of national parks to protect their monopolies in tourism accommodation and transport. While the town and park were established as a tourism destination for economic purposes, there was a strong political subtext coming from Prime Minister John A. MacDonald. Taken from the idea for national parks in the United States, Canada saw parks as symbols of a national heritage that made up for the perceived lack of cultural heritage in comparison to Europe (Kopas 2007; McNamee 2002). This was framed within the government's "responsibility" to make the land "useful" to develop a national economy. Kopas (2007) writes that parks were initially designed for their economic development function, beginning with the government's appropriation of the hot springs in Banff. The government then gave monopolistic commercial opportunities to the CPR, to serve greater expansionist goals of the government.

Today, Banff National Park has expanded to encompass 6,641 km² of Alberta's Rocky Mountains. Framed by the towering peaks of the Rocky Mountains and shaped by the waters of the Bow River tumbling over falls and meandering through lush forests, the town
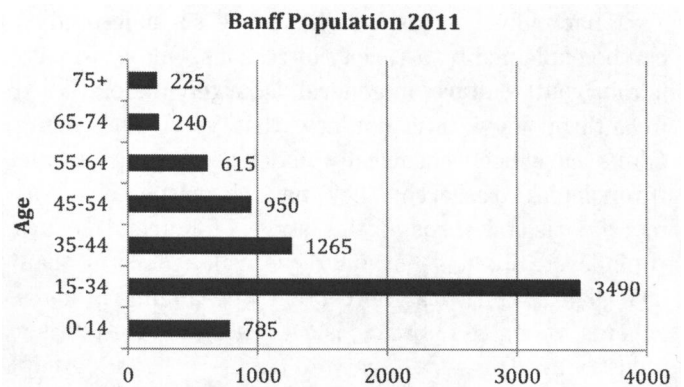

Figure 1: Banff Population[4] (Government of Canada, Community Information Database 2011)

of Banff is the heart of Banff National Park. The park attracts over 4 million visitors each year not only to experience the natural aesthetics of its environment but also to enjoy its ski hills, golf courses, outdoor activities, shopping malls and variety of restaurants and coffee shops in town (Town of Banff 2011).

The town of Banff's resident population is low, regulated by a "need to reside" policy.[3] In other words, one must be employed in Banff to be allowed to reside in the town. The 2011 Banff municipal census counted a town population of just over 8,000, 1,000 of whom (or 12.5 per cent) are considered "temporary" or employed a minimum of 30 days. Many of these are mobile tourism workers (Town of Banff 2011). Forty-four per cent of the population is between the ages of 15 and 34, a trend echoed in Canadian resort communities, such as Whistler, British Columbia. The 2011 Banff age demographic data emphasize the "youthfulness" of Banff (Figure 1).

More than 60 per cent of Banff residents have lived there for less than ten years. Of those residents who have lived in Banff for less than five years, 26.5 per cent came from outside of Canada and 22.4 per cent came from out of province (Town of Banff 2011). In the past 15 years, Banff has had in-migration of 40 per cent to 50 per cent, more than twice the provincial average (Industry Canada 2012). These town demographics suggest the very real presence of young adult mobile tourism workers and thus set the stage for our research to explore this understudied group.

Banff Case Study: Methods and Objectives

For the purpose of our initial research study, our methods involved reviewing primary literature of differing levels of government (government policy and reports), as well as more local-level accounts from business
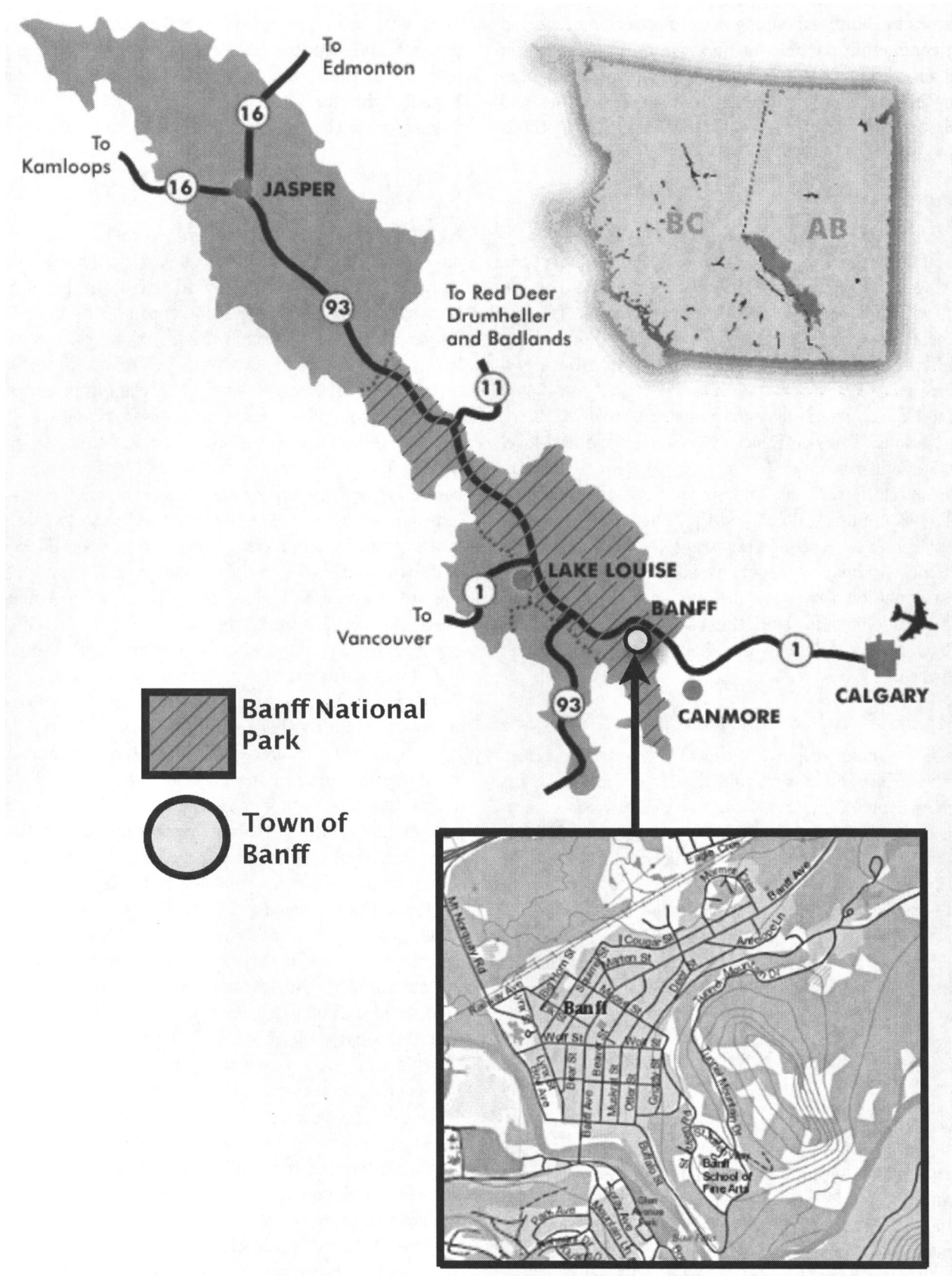
Map 1: Location of Banff National Park and Banff Town Site

operators in Banff; examining social networking Internet sites; conducting participant observation in the town of Banff on various fieldwork trips; and conducting one-on-one interviews with tourism company operators and mobile tourism workers. We will outline these methods and indicate the intended objectives sought for each.

Primary Literature: Government Policy and Reports

We examined a range of the available primary literature, mostly web-based and grey literature reports. This included examining policy and practice from the federal, provincial and local town–level governing bodies: the Canadian Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade for their programs of "travel and work in Canada from abroad"; Industry Canada's "Building a National Tourism Strategy" report; provincial-level programs and resources for foreign workers as tourism and hospitality workers; and, from local governments, Banff's "Community Plan" and the "Business and Community Plan" for the neighbouring town of Canmore. From these primary sources, we sought to map out the relevant top-down decision makers and programs that set the guidelines for and thus shaped and regulated mobility, work, residency and heritage representation in the area.

Primary Literature: Local-Level Accounts

We also examined reports by local business operators, including Fairmont Hotels and the large and dominant Brewster Travel Canada, as well as smaller tourist operators, such as Discover Banff Tours and Ecojourney Adventure Company. The objective was to gain a sense of what kinds of work/jobs were offered and who were the mobile tourism workers filling these positions. In addition, we wanted to explore how and if these businesses made use of any of the government programs for recruiting workers, either from abroad or from across Canada.

Primary Literature: Social Networking Internet Sites

Additional information was collected using social networking Internet sites that provided information about integrating into employment and life in Banff. It was immediately clear from our examination that this type of online communication is significant in shaping the motivations and experiences of mobile tourism workers. These Internet-based resources provided us with current and dynamic information that proved to be highly useful in obtaining contacts and understanding community-level

initiatives, as well as considering forums that discuss the positive and negative aspects of the tourism industry (e.g., blogs that rant about housing issues in Banff). Equally, this form of communication is also used as a means for tourism employers to access their labour pool.

Fieldwork: Participant Observation in the Town of Banff

In addition to the primary literature review, we also undertook the field methods of participant observation and interviews. We first carried out an initial "surveillance" study, to get a first-hand sense of the lived experience of mobile tourism workers, along with some of the issues they face as they work and live in Banff town. We sought to "get a sense" of what inter-provincial and international tourism workers arriving in Banff would experience as they looked for work and accommodation. Thus, we had our undergraduate and graduate research participants (similar in age to would-be mobile tourism workers, based on our age demographic research) visit information centres and job boards, collect newspapers for the employment sections and go to the Job Resource Centre. They also searched housing boards and visited the hostels in town.

This active participant observation yielded an interesting response, as it was immediately assumed that these researchers were themselves seeking work and accommodation by those whom they encountered. They were instantly perceived not as the researchers they were nor as tourists but as tourism workers. With little prompting, these student researchers were given information and advice as to how best to proceed in finding work and accommodation; there was a clear and specific sequence in the process of looking for a job, beginning work and then searching for accommodation. This is the same process that most young adult mobile workers would experience in their attempt to work and live in the community. Unlike for vacationing tourists, places such as free Internet access sites, the employment resource centre and affordable accommodation are the prioritized destinations for newly arriving tourism workers. Provisional accommodation (i.e., short-term accommodation while searching for a more permanent arrangement) is limited to hostels, as no inexpensive motels/hotels exist in the town. The student researchers found that the employment resource centre and worker integration programs were readily available and easily accessible. Thus, this direct experience method allowed the student research participants to get an initial perspective about what it would be like to be a newly arrived tourism worker in Banff. It also provided us with in-

sight into the community dynamics for mobile tourism workers, as well as resources and programs created through community initiatives. The information from this participant observation "surveillance" supported our decision (established first through our primary literature review) to engage with key organizations and community programs.

Fieldwork: One-on-One Interviews

As a product of the participant observation fieldwork, we contacted and interviewed three different groups: town community workers (five interviews), small tourism company operators (three interviews), and mobile tourism workers (ten interviews). The town community workers we spoke with included the coordinator of BanffLIFE (a non-profit organization aimed at "easing newcomers into the community" and specifically targeted at young adults aged 18–30); the director of YWCA Banff, regarding housing and support of entry-level workers; the coordinator of the Job Resource Centre, concerning the process that entry-level tourism workers must go through to find employment; the Town of Banff's officer dealing with temporary foreign workers and their working and living conditions in Banff; and the coordinator of Banff Heritage Tourism, who established the Banff Ambassador program mentioned at the beginning of this article. Both these interviews and our participant observation highlighted how essential these community programs are to the integration of mobile tourism workers. The small tourism company operators we interviewed (Ecojourney, Discover Banff Tours) had often themselves been mobile tourism workers, who had come to Banff seeking work in the tourism industry before establishing their business. Through our participant observation and, in part, as a result of word of mouth, we were able to contact and conduct initial interviews with ten mobile tourism workers. These interviews aimed to illuminate the on-the-ground lives and issues facing mobile tourism workers in Banff, as we asked questions about their travel, work and living experiences.

Banff Case Study: Findings

In examining primary governmental documents and literature, we found there was concern about declining tourism numbers, generally across Canada and, more locally, within Banff specifically.[5] Governments at all levels are now closely examining their strategies toward tourism and identifying specific areas for improvement in an attempt to mitigate this problem. One area targeted for improvement at the national level concerns mobile tourist workers and aims at improving "human resource

strategies to attract and retain employees in the [tourism] industry" (Industry Canada 2012). This strategy recognizes that retaining employees increases productivity and efficiencies in Canada's tourism industry. The Canadian federal government has identified that it should "foster an adequate supply of skills and labour to enhance visitor experience through quality service and hospitality" (Government of Canada 2011:53). In order do to this, tourism jobs are being promoted as an attractive career choice:

> Although the tourism industry offers the first work experience for many people, the sector is sometimes ill-perceived as a career choice. At the same time, the ability to attract skilled employees is critical to the industry's growth. There is a need to promote the wide range of long-term career opportunities and prospects that tourism offers, particularly in the operation and management ranks, as well as general hospitality. Attractions, hotels, airlines, auto rentals and entertainment are but a few of the areas that offer rewarding, long-term careers. [Industry Canada 2012]

At a more local level, the municipal government of Canmore (a neighbouring town and bedroom community of Banff) has also recognized the need to support its tourism industry by focusing on tourism workers, addressing the importance of the "social fabric" of the community and ways to "attract, include, keep and celebrate a wide range of people" (Town of Canmore 2011). Yet municipal governments tend not to have the purview to be able to attract tourism workers and, thus, are at the mercy of and are directed by the private sector tourism industry or federal-level international agreements for recruiting tourism workers locally. Once arrived, however, there is a disjuncture between the recognized necessity of tourism workers and inadequate approaches to and funding of local-level initiatives for retaining and supporting these vital workers. While municipal governments may want to find innovative solutions to sustain and secure mobile tourism workers, they do not necessarily have the personnel or the financial capacity to do so.

These policies impact on the operation of the tourism industry and on the mobile tourism workers themselves, although this is overlooked in much of the very strategies meant to improve their conditions. Many of the government "top-down" initiatives ignore the experiences, realities and life situations of a vital component of the tourism industry: the workers.

While the tourism industry contributes approximately $61.4 billion (2005) to the Canadian economy, the lives

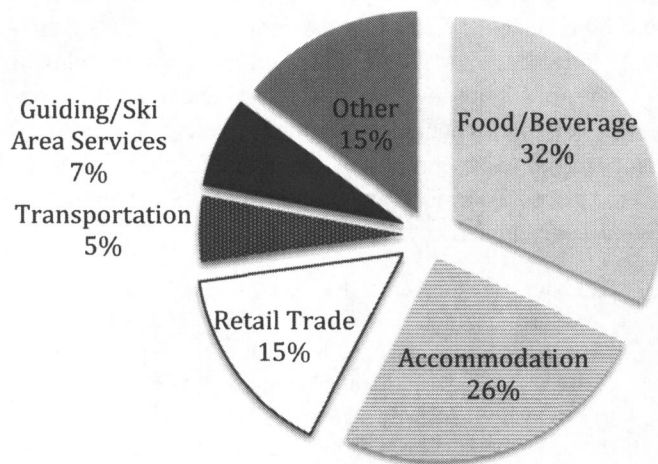## Banff Employment in Tourism Sector

Figure 2: Banff Employment in Tourism Sector[6] (Adapted from Town of Banff Statistics)

of the many tourism workers who are integral to this industry are little understood (Industry Canada 2012). An ethnographic approach to understanding the lived experiences of tourism workers is invaluable to understanding the Canadian context of mobile work in the world's largest industry and can provide insight into the effectiveness of government strategies that affect mobile tourism workers. That is why, as will be shown in the findings from our participant observation and interviews later in this article, our research aims to implement a "bottom-up" approach that places the mobile tourism worker at the centre of inquiry and is, thereby, better able to reveal the issues, challenges and opportunities they face as they travel to and work and reside in Banff.

In Alberta, tourism employs 168,100 people (Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council 2008). This accounts for 10 per cent of all employment in the province. More specific to Banff, tourism directly employs 70 per cent of the population. For tourism workers, jobs are entry-level seasonal positions—for example, hotel workers, cooks, restaurant servers, baristas, customer service staff at various local stores, tourist guides, ski instructors, ski hill lift and customer service staff, river guides, etc. In Banff, employment in the tourism sector within broad service-related employment is as shown in Figure 2.

Mobile tourism workers in Banff form many different demographic sub-communities based on a range of variables. The international Banff residents/tourism workers come from several different countries, including: the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Britain, Germany, Japan, Korea and the Czech Republic. There

are also many mobile workers from Canada who have travelled inter-provincially to work in Banff. While the motivation for travel is varied and beyond the scope of this article, it is noteworthy that there is at least a local perception that both the Japanese and the Quebecois come to Banff in large part to learn English.

Where the workers come from also distinguishes their membership in a specific sub-community, dependent on what kind of visa status they hold and whether it can be extended. Tourism employers must hire international workers who possess one of five types of foreign working visas: a work visa, a working holiday visa, a student visa, a foreign temporary worker visa or the provincial nominee program visa. Within Banff, most of the tourism workers are part of the Canadian bilateral agreement with various countries and therefore fall under the working holiday visa program. The advantages of the working holiday visa program for tourism businesses are also well recognized by the provincial government. The working holiday visa program is one of the easiest and quickest ways to hire international workers ready and eager to work in the national parks of British Columbia and Alberta (Government of Canada, Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, 2014). To qualify for this program and thus work in Canada under the bilateral working holiday visa program, the individual must be from one of the 29 countries specified and under the age of 35 (unless from a country with younger age restrictions). While the working holiday visa program is not gender-specific, in Alberta, individuals who work in the tourism industry are 54.7 per cent female and 45.3 per cent male (Government of Canada Sector Council Program 2006).

As we learned in discussions with tourism industry managers, mobile tourism workers are further distinguished into sub-communities based on what work season they arrive in: the winter (ski instructors) or the summer season (white water rafting guides). Further, we were told by community residents there is a general sense that the winter tourism workers tend to stay longer and are more interested in integrating into the community life of the town, whereas the summer tourism workers tend to stay for shorter times, are less interested in integrating into the community and are regarded by "townies" as the party group: loud, noisy and disruptive, especially at the height of the season in July and August. The shoulder seasons are quieter and the number of mobile tourism workers drops significantly. Of course, the seasonality of the work also distinguishes what kinds of jobs are available (further characterizing the sub-communities of tourism workers). Therefore, rather than being one homogenous identity group, these mobile tourism workers are made up of many different complex

and varied categories of workers differentiated by age, gender, nationality, first language, type of work and motivation for travelling to and seeking employment in Banff. The complexity of these different subgroups is yet another reason why this research is essential to support policy-making decisions and to advance the understanding of human mobility.

Our fieldwork interviews with town community workers, small tourism company operators and especially the mobile tourism workers themselves further reinforced the degree of marginality that the tourism workers experience, whether due to the seasonality of employment, the types of available jobs or the residency policy in Banff town. While nominally there may be more security in hotel, food services and retail jobs as opposed to the season-specific jobs in the ski resorts or river guiding, the tourism industry is notoriously unpredictable and changeable and job security is always under threat for transient workers. Notwithstanding some exceptions, most jobs are low-paying, lack benefits or are dependent on gratuities. As a result of an ample supply of available tourism workers willing to accept minimum wages for the perceived fun, the environment or a free ski pass for the season, the job market is more challenging for permanent tourism workers, who struggle to make a living on lower wages. One mobile tourism worker explained, "I was offered a job working in a daycare but I'm not going to compete with someone willing to do that job for only $8.00 an hour and a ski pass" (Mobile Tourism Worker Interview B, February 17, 2012).

In addition to such challenging permanent employment conditions, Banff is an especially expensive place to live. Another worker, who had worked at five different companies over the past ten years, stated that "People are working full-time in gift shops but don't have enough money to put food on the table—they are having to get food baskets to just eat in Banff" (Mobile Tourism Worker Interview A, February 17, 2012). One of the small tourism operators explained that

> You might be sold on the idea that you can come to Banff to work in a coffee shop and go hiking every weekend but then, by the time you have paid for your accommodation and the food on your table, you realize that you are working 60 hours a week just to do that and you have no time to go hiking or skiing; a lot of people come here planning to work one job but end up with two just to make ends meet. [Small Tourism Operator Interview C, February 17, 2012]

The first interviewee said, "I work 55 hours a week but am considered 'part-time'; I have no contract and am paid by the hour—I spend my days either working or sleeping" (Mobile Tourism Worker Interview A, February 17, 2012).

Accommodation is also a critical issue for mobile tourism workers in Banff. It is tremendously expensive to reside in Banff. The town of Canmore, just 25 kilometres away, has become somewhat of a bedroom community for Banff, but it is still relatively expensive and for those workers without a vehicle it is not an option, since there is no public transportation between the two towns. One tour operator explained that he had been living in Calgary (130 kilometres from Banff) because the housing was cheaper, but "after working a nine-hour day white water rafting and then having a three-hour commute on top of that to and from Calgary every day—it really wears on you—and I moved to Canmore" (Small Tourism Operator Interview C, February 17, 2012).

In addition, as mentioned previously, one must be employed in Banff to be legally allowed to live in the town. The result is that many who are looking for work or are between jobs end up living illegally, squatting or couch-surfing with friends (i.e., moving frequently from house to house and sleeping in whatever space is available). Rental accommodations are often overcrowded (illegally so)—it is not unusual to have six or more living in one apartment. One official told us it is a landlords' market and that many take advantage of the situation (Town Community Worker Interview D, February 16, 2012). Town officials are aware of such cramped conditions but opt to turn a blind eye, knowing that, if they did not, many mobile tourism workers would be without any accommodation at all.

There is a different accommodation situation for those working in hotels. Often those who obtain employment in hotels are provided with accommodation on the hotel grounds. However, this situation has its own issues and some hotel service workers are effectively indentured to work a certain period for particularly long hours and low pay, while a significant portion of their pay cheque is allocated back to the hotel as rent for the accommodation they provide. The director of the YWCA (Town Community Worker Interview E, February 16, 2012) explained that these mobile tourism workers are often trapped in this situation since, if they leave, they have no job and no housing and little money to tide them over until they find new work. In other situations, hotel workers obtained their employment as a sponsored employee through a federal government and tourism business agreement (Town Community Worker Interview D, February 16, 2012). In these cases, the company essentially controls hotel workers and their agency can be expressed only within the most rudimentary labour

laws (Town Community Worker Interview E, February 16, 2012). Under this arrangement, the workers can legally work only for the company that sponsored them. If the sponsor terminates the contract, deportation is an option but is at the expense of the company. Many of these hotel workers are young women, and many do not speak much English, thus making them further isolated (Town Community Worker Interview E, February 16, 2012). The variations and the dynamic experiences produced by housing experiences in Banff are one area that certainly requires further focused attention and research.

Conclusions: Toward an Ethnography of Mobile Tourism Workers

These precarious working and housing conditions mean that mobile tourism workers are often living marginal lives. And their marginality is exacerbated by their often-times peripheral social status in town since mobile tourism workers are often regarded as a necessary evil and not really part of the town community, even though they are essential for its livelihood. Despite their indispensability as a labour class, individually they have little economic or political agency. Indeed, their situation is well worth investigation to make visible the complexities of their mobile work experiences and, through partnering with workers and community members, to foster more integrative programs and practices.

Many of these tourism workers are young adults and their narratives are "coming of age" stories. On many occasions, we were told that this experience of living and working in the tourism industry was a "rite of passage" that adolescents and young adults had to undergo before becoming fully mature adults. Whether on a gap year, before or during post-secondary education, getting overseas experience or participating in a working holiday program, for many this is a transitional time in their lives. In fact, there is often a biased perception among the general population that all of these workers are "here for a good time, not a long time," that they are irresponsible and "just want to party." While of course this may very well be the case for some mobile tourism workers, it is not the case for all. Indeed, it is even assumed that, as part of the "coming of age experience," every 20-something-year-old *ought* to experience these conditions of marginality in employment and housing, as that is merely part of the experience.

However, this kind of stereotyping diminishes the attention to the very real social issues mobile workers face in terms of marginal employment, marginal housing and little agency or political power to change the system themselves. In many cases, young transient tourism workers experience real struggles working and living in Banff. Not only must they cope with marginal, low-paying, non-benefited, insecure employment, but also they must endure marginal, overcrowded housing conditions while often suffering from social stereotyping and discrimination.

From these initial findings, we learned of the vital role that the mobile tourism worker plays in the tourism industry and especially so in the tourism destination place of Banff. But we also uncovered the fact that because these tourism workers are young, transient, stereotyped and assumed to be "privileged" and to have "chosen" their lifestyle, they are *not* considered to be "locals" as was the claim in the Banff Ambassador Information presentation that introduced this article. Rather, they are viewed as dispensable labour, such that the issues of their marginal work and housing conditions have largely gone ignored.

Our study, though in its early stages, has already begun to lay bare these issues. We wanted to reveal some of the context for these mobile tourism workers in Banff, to expose some of the misconceptions and/or lack of attention paid to this marginal, understudied type of tourism worker. It is clear that anthropological inquiry can have a role to play in enabling a move away from oversimplified explanations of the lived experiences of mobile tourism workers and toward understanding their true demographics, issues and dynamics as they travel to, work and live in Banff.

In the research initiative we have started to conduct in Banff, we have realized that there are pressing reasons to engage in an ethnographic study of mobile tourism workers. As we prepare to further explore the issues of travel/work experience, mobility, identity and place toward a full ethnography of mobile tourism workers in the Banff area, we hope to be able to provide further insight to benefit local community and government organizations as they seek to resolve some of the problems faced by these workers. In addition, it will be intriguing to examine how these transformative experiences of travel and work help to shape the identities of the workers, as much as the workers help to shape the character of a quintessentially Canadian, iconic place. There is no better opportunity to understand experiences of transformative identity-building, as these young adult tourism workers face specific challenges and lay the foundation of who they will be in the future.

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Notes

1. The term *youth* is often used to define this demographic. The term varies considerably in its usage. *Youth* is commonly used to refer to people less than 18 years of age. Or *youth* is used in conjunction with *young adult* to indicate individuals between the ages of 18 and 25. However, the working holiday visa program under the youth mobility agreement requires that individuals be between the ages of 18 and 35.

2. To read further about the concept of "manufacturing wilderness" and the impact the establishment of the park had on the Nakoda First Nations communities whose traditional territory was incorporated into the park lands, see Armstrong et al. (2009), Binnema and Niemi (2006) and Taylor (2011).

3. Banff is not the only national park in the country that has a resident community, but it does have specific issues of social and urban planning that go hand-in-hand with the dual mandate of the national parks system that must balance ecological integrity with recreational opportunity. While not part of this discussion, for further reading on this issue see Nelson (1994), Nelson et al. (1999) and Scace (1993).

4. From a survey population of 6,500.

5. In the last eight years, the Canadian tourism industry has seen a decline in visitation numbers and is no longer among the top ten global destinations (Industry Canada 2012).

6. The "tourism sector" includes only types of employment that are directly involved in "primary tourism employment." Therefore, employment in government, education and health, albeit related to the tourism industry, is considered secondary tourism employment (since they are necessary for providing essential municipal services for the tourism industry). These types of municipal service employment were not included in Figure 2.

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