Cannabis Tourism:
Places, Spaces and Opportunities

Adam Keul and Brian Eisenhauer
Plymouth State University

Photo: Lindsey Bartlett
Plan of Action

- Background / Methods
- Theory / Questions
- Findings / Experiences
- Future / Opportunities

Terms

**Space**: the legal, political, and economic aspects

**Place**: the lived, local, unique experience

Dr. Brian Eisenhauer is an environmental sociologist with a focus on sustainability and community collaboration and communication.

Dr. Adam Keul is a tourism geographer with a focus on tourism political economies and nature tourism.
January 1, 2014 marked the kickoff of a niche market in cannabis tourism.

Research Objectives:
• Document the emergence of these unique experiences
• Understand the types of tourism products and customers
• Interpret the data to understand possible future opportunities

Toni Fox and Sean Azzariti: Denver, Colorado
Is cannabis tourism similar to wine and beer tourism?

How do governments and communities impact the development of cannabis tourism?
Methods

- Participant observation on fifteen different tours/sites in CO, OR
- Semi-structured interviews with thirty-two cannabis tourism producers and tourists plus many informal interviews
- Analysis of the political economic landscape
- Transcription, coding, dissemination

Why these methods?

- Best for understanding emerging market
- Little quantitative data exists
- Allows for experiential analysis
Interview Questions

Research Interview Questions for Marijuana-based tourism operators

- Please explain how you started your business.
  - Did you work in tourism prior to the legalization of recreational marijuana in Colorado?
  - Did you actively participate in the campaign to legalize recreational marijuana?
  - Do you regularly consume marijuana?

- Please outline the range of services your business provides.
  - What do you hope to teach your clients about marijuana?
  - What do you hope to teach your clients about the marijuana industry?
  - How do you hope to expand the range of services you provide?

- How is the natural environment of the region integrated into the experiences that you offer?
  - Do you find that your clients are interested in nature-based tourism that involves marijuana consumption?

- Does your business partner with other marijuana-based businesses (dispensaries, grow operations, smoking apparatus stores)?
  - Do you partner with other businesses that offer tourism products similar to what you are offering?
  - Please assess the level of competition in the Denver-area marijuana tourism industry.

- From your experience, what are the basic gender, age, race and socio-economic status of your clientele?
  - Do you hope to expand your clientele into other demographic groups? If so, how?

- Have you ever toured a winery or vineyard?
  - Do you see any similarities between the tourism products you offer and those offered by vineyards and wineries?
  - Have you ever considered wine or beer tourism as a model for developing your own marijuana tourism products?

- In your opinion, what will the future of marijuana tourism look like in Colorado?

- Is there anything else you can tell us that might help us understand the development of this industry?
**Data Processing: AtlasTI**

**Transcribed interview**

**Thematic Coding**
Tourism Worldmaking
Tourism producers oversee the creation of tourism place-cultures by crafting the representations, discourses and knowledges about those places.

Worldmaking Beyond Representation
Tourism Worldmaking can also be viewed as a powerful political economic process which structures the laws and markets for places through tourism.
Legal Spaces: structuring the experience

Colorado Amendment 64
“treat cannabis like alcohol consumption”

No public consumption: What is public?
• No consumption on hotel balconies
• No consumption at dispensaries
• No “social consumption” (bar/club)
• No consumption in an automobile*

*Unless the vehicle is a registered limousine

The greatest impact on the development of cannabis tourism is made by the laws on public consumption.
Varying laws produce different products and experiences.

Oregon dispensaries can sell clones (plants) unlike those in Colorado.
Findings: Dimensions of cannabis tourism experiences
Experiences:
Standard “driven tour”

Dispensaries
• Get weed: instrumental
• Educate clients about cannabis strains, means of consumption, laws
• Dispensary identity
• B2B partnership with operators
Each phase of the cannabis growing process is presented.

Growers are becoming less willing to allow tours.

“Well one of the reasons, when they first started people were walking through it like a cornfield like ‘whee I’m in pot plants’” (tour guide)
Tour dynamics are also greatly mediated by the type of vehicle guides use, thus crowd size.

Party Bus/Limo/Passenger Van/SUV

“This is the attraction- getting on the bus with all these people …You’re all bloody different. You come from all different walks of life from a different state but you smoke weed. You love weed. We love marijuana- it has shaped our realities.”
(Tour Guide: WeedJesus)
Experiences

Integrations of place: environment, history, arts
Findings: Lodging

- Space: legal challenges to consumption
- Making space: Bed and Breakfasts; AirBnB
- Community scale regulations (US)
- Canadian approach

“'I'm not creating a crack den what I am creating…I'm going to elevate your place.”’
(Lodging Operator)

“They are like at grandma's house but grandma let's them get high. And that's what we really try to do.”
(Lodging Operator)
Findings: Deviance

Challenging deviance through discourse

- Legitimization of the industry
- De-stigmatizing the plant
- De-stigmatizing consumers

“From early on we didn’t want to call it pot or weed marijuana is a racist term left over from prohibition. We wanted it to be called what the plant is- cannabis. …Cannabis is where I took it for very intentional reasons.”

“The industry as a whole is attracting more people to the city than ever has been here before. People who come skiing you know what they normally did before this existed here? They drove right past this Cowtown. Now they’re staying. Now they are spending their money and two years in they have yet to acknowledge our impact.”
The Future: Spaces, Places, and Opportunities

Effective Spacemaking
• Multi-scaled from community to national
• Participatory planning/zoning
• Consistent practices, predictable outcomes

Effective Placemaking
• Utilize local setting/culture
• Adaptability
• Niche identities
• Integrate with existing tourism offerings
The Future: Spaces, Places, and Opportunities

Effective Spacemaking
• Multi-scaled from community to national
• Participatory planning/zoning
• Consistent practices, predictable outcomes

Effective Placemaking
• Utilize local setting/culture
• Integrate with existing tourism offerings
• Adaptability
• Niche identities

Opportunities
• Community/Regional identity (Napa)
• Creation of new experiences
  social clubs, cafes, nature tourism
• Prohibition market
“I don’t know. There's so many experiences that can be enhanced!”

(Tour Guide)
Future Research Possibilities

- Worldmaking and the tourism experience
- Economic impact analysis
- Mining big data
- Availability of public data in Canada
- Social impact analysis
- Communication, representation, and social constructions of deviance
- Many emerging possibilities
Thanks!

Any Questions?