

# Common Land, Common Ground: Imagining Sense of Place Connections Among Local People

Mya Wheeler Wiens & John Sinclair  
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Kenora, ON – Tunnel Island

Common Ground SSHRC/CURA project:  
*Common Ground Research Forum: A Cross-Cultural Learning Platform for Resource Sharing*

# Connections to Place

**The Place: Tunnel Island, Kenora ON**

- Common Land, Common Ground movement (2000)
  - “to foster constructive working relationships between First Nation and non-First Nation governments”
  - Shared Land + Shared Benefits in the spirit of the 1873 Treaty
- Land acquired as a gift from Abitibi Consolidated - Tunnel Island (northern part), Rat Portage, and Old Fort Island

**Building blocks over roadblocks**

From Kenora Minor Daily News July 9, 2007  
Found at [www.r2100stage.com/page1.html](http://www.r2100stage.com/page1.html)

Image credits: from Top Left then clockwise:  
1. [http://www.ratportage.com/Quickstart/ImageLib/Common\\_Ground\\_Lands\\_and\\_Crossroads\\_Area\\_2.jpg](http://www.ratportage.com/Quickstart/ImageLib/Common_Ground_Lands_and_Crossroads_Area_2.jpg)  
2. [http://ca.epodunk.com/images/locatorMaps/on/ON\\_2001097.gif](http://ca.epodunk.com/images/locatorMaps/on/ON_2001097.gif)  
3. <http://www.ontariotowns.net/Kenora/FAQ.cfm>

0.5 Kilometers

# Purpose

- To understand how different people connect with place and how engaging this connection informs their vision and ability to imagine future possibilities for shared place

# Regional Shifts towards Tourism


- From Forestry Capital (Report 1999) to “forest” capital – emphasis on tourist destination
- This shift continued to feature in sense of place discussions about Tunnel Island

From <http://netnewledger.com/pg=4820>



## Methods


- Interviews (Semi-Structured) – 25 participants
- Modified Sharing Circle Focus Groups – 3 groups conducted with previously interviewed participants
- Participant Observation & Brief Document Review



## Analysis - NVivo™

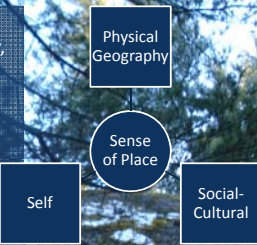
### Connections, Perspectives, Visions

- Connections
  - How are people connected? Disconnected?
  - Activities, Childhood experiences, CLCG, Connection Disconnections
  - Activities include: Recreation, Social, Recreation & Social, Spiritual, Residence, Livelihood
- Perspectives
  - Sense of Place communicated through various aspects
  - Landscape, Change (Land Use, Nostalgia), Community, Respect, Economy, Northern Lifestyle
- Visions



## Sense of Place

- Sense of Place (SOP) – Place is a dynamic intersection between society, self and the physical environment creating a *sense of place*. This is then communicated through various perspectives.
- Contested Space
- Integrated NRM implications - Connection to place fosters care of place and engaging this connection, through the research process or other participatory process, encourages connection.



## Connections

- Recreational & Social
- Spiritual
- Childhood experiences (stories)

*"I look at [Tunnel Island] as my sanctuary, you know, the end of the day and it was a place where you could just totally forget everything else and it was like a sanctuary." (I11026)*

### Connection Disconnections (Perspective)

- Childhood to Adulthood
- Marginalization (being asked to leave)
- Fear of being disconnected (not allowed to go there or use place without notice)




## Perspectives

- Being "in the heart" of the city
- An economic Gem
- Important for community and individual health and wellness
- Powerful and deserving of respect and care

*"There's an opportunity for people to get to know each other, you know in our busy world, a place for people to go and relax and enjoy...unrushed learning, participate in whatever capacity you want to participate in." (AM1119)*

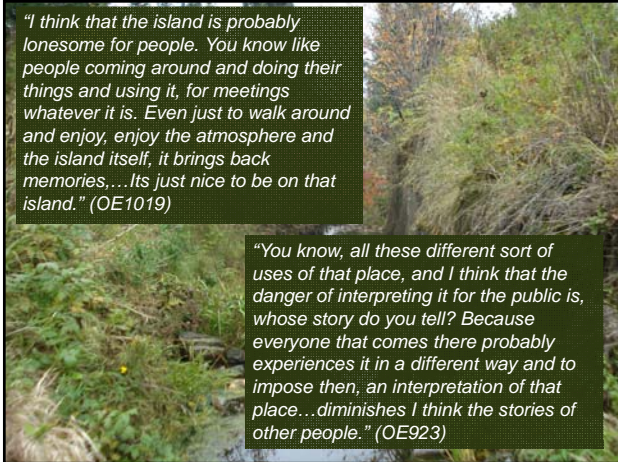



## Visions

- Overall agreement about keeping the use of Tunnel Island the same, with some improvements and/or minor development
- Concern expressed regarding involvement and possibilities that might take place.
- Tunnel Island as a place to find healing, strengthen family and friend relationships, find solitude, and learn lessons about interconnectivity of all things. To connect with the spiritual or natural realm by simply being there and/or by participating in feast and thanksgiving gatherings.





*"I think that the island is probably lonesome for people. You know like people coming around and doing their things and using it, for meetings whatever it is. Even just to walk around and enjoy, enjoy the atmosphere and the island itself, it brings back memories, ... Its just nice to be on that island." (OE1019)*

*"You know, all these different sort of uses of that place, and I think that the danger of interpreting it for the public is, whose story do you tell? Because everyone that comes there probably experiences it in a different way and to impose then, an interpretation of that place... diminishes I think the stories of other people." (OE923)*



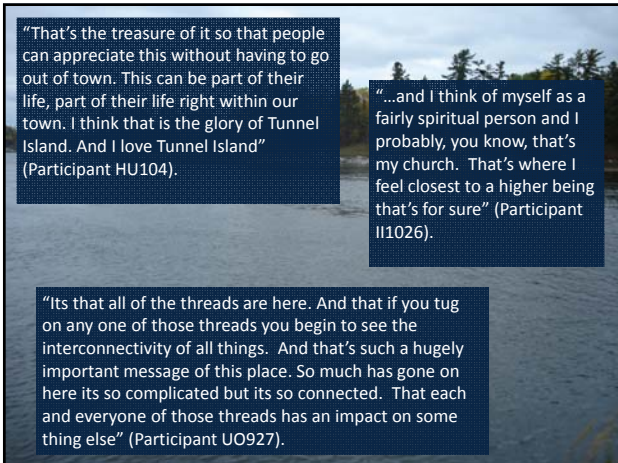
## Conclusions

**Sense of Place research**

- Using SOP as a framework to engage community in discussions about Tunnel Island
- A place as a connecting point to reveal diversity
- Power of place to promote "positive self-identity, community engagement, and care for one's surroundings" (Proposal, 12).

**Dynamic nature of Places**

- Massey (1993, 2005) – The event of place
- Contested, but not in conflict – Recognition of layers of habitation and geographic/ecological intersections
- Inclusion = allowing people to be involved in change of connection places



*"That's the treasure of it so that people can appreciate this without having to go out of town. This can be part of their life, part of their life right within our town. I think that is the glory of Tunnel Island. And I love Tunnel Island" (Participant HU104).*

*"...and I think of myself as a fairly spiritual person and I probably, you know, that's my church. That's where I feel closest to a higher being that's for sure" (Participant II1026).*

*"Its that all of the threads are here. And that if you tug on any one of those threads you begin to see the interconnectivity of all things. And that's such a hugely important message of this place. So much has gone on here its so complicated but its so connected. That each and everyone of those threads has an impact on some thing else" (Participant UO927).*

