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Scandals, the mass media, and the politics of extreme visibility: conflict and controversy at the Niagara Parks Commission

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This paper explores the political and media scrutiny of management-related activities at the Niagara Parks Commission (NPC) in Niagara Falls, Canada. This commission is the quasi-autonomous body responsible for the operation of tourism-oriented amenities around the Canadian Horseshoe Falls and along the Niagara River. Between 2009 and 2011, the management of the NPC became politically contentious and certain incidents were publicised by the media. There were accusations of impropriety with respect to the use of an expense account, disputes about untendered contracts, and complaints about conflicts of interest. These incidents could be described as scandals, breaches of accepted rules of conduct that are communicated to a wider audience via the mass media. Three dialectical tensions were identified when these scandals were analysed. The tensions, it is argued, are expressions of a wider trend: a politics of extreme visibility. Scandal-related visibility is different from the forms of visibility that have been previously addressed by tourism scholars. Publicity related to alleged misconduct is typically unwanted by tourism managers. Controversies about the management of the NPC demonstrate that practitioners must be alert to the damaging potential of extreme visibility. Fear of scandal, however, may simultaneously stifle enterprise. Managers must strike a careful balance.

Keywords: scandal; media; politics; tourism; destination; Niagara

Introduction

Scandals are important events that expose political dynamics. They are a fixture of open societies with a free and independent press (Neckel, 2005). This paper demonstrates that tourism organisations are not immune to scandal and that the way in which they function can become highly politicised. A series of incidents related to the operation of the Niagara Parks Commission (NPC) in Niagara Falls, Canada between 2009 and 2011 became widely publicised. It was publicity that transformed these incidents, which some observers characterised as serious transgressions, into scandals. Scandals matter because they reflect new conditions of heightened visibility that managers need to understand.

The management of tourism, especially when organisations with ties to government become involved, has the potential to become politicised (Burns & Novelli, 2007; Jamal & McDonald, 2011). A scandal is an alleged transgression of certain norms and values that can have damaging consequences for the individuals and institutions seen to be guilty of misconduct (Thompson, 2000, 2005). Particular individuals or organisational practices become the unanticipated focus of public scrutiny; alleged misdeeds are

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exposed and communicated to a wider audience. The media possesses unmatched power in terms of its ability to transform secret acts of wrongdoing into scandalous actions. Without publicity, there is no scandal.

Some events emerge from the mass of frequent misdeeds to become full-blown scandals. Potentially scandal-worthy events do not always assume scandal status. Context is crucial (Fine, 1997). Scandals may only make sense against the background of cultural norms. The threshold for a scandal is therefore relative to accepted conventions. Moreover, scandals are social (and political) constructions; certain circumstances are necessary for them to take place. Organisations or individuals, driven quite often by self-interest, may make claims about certain events and use the media strategically as a means to disseminate their views. Events that could be regarded as overly complex and not easily associated with a perpetrator may never become scandals. Scandals are therefore shaped by culture, context, claims-making, and even chance.

The activities of the NPC received considerable political and media scrutiny as a result of a series of scandals that occurred. One scandal was a product of accusations that an expense account was used inappropriately. Two other scandals involved awarding contracts to service providers without seeking tenders. Furthermore, there were two instances where conflicts of interest had allegedly taken place. These different scandals were used by some for reasons related to political strategy. Political manoeuvring contributes to a climate of scandals. The NPC is affiliated with the Ministry of Tourism and Culture in the province of Ontario. Opposition party politicians promoted the idea that certain incidents that took place at the NPC were scandalous in order to challenge or undermine those in government. When newspapers reports about the scandals were analysed in detail, three dialectical tensions were present.

The tensions that are identified in this paper encompass a range of issues. Each tension has a connection with the scrutiny and visibility of people and organisations through the media. The first tension addresses the symbolic, image-oriented nature of scandals (Thompson, 2000, 2005) and their connection with the concrete ramifications such scandals have for certain people involved. Image-driven phenomena exist alongside – and are intertwined with – tangible, real-world effects. Second, scandals create diversionary political theatre and, at the same time, perform an important societal function because they can be used against those in positions of authority who abuse their power. Defects within government bodies need exposure (Marshall, 2011) but the media, through its pursuit of salacious content, runs the risk of trivialising events. Holding public officials accountable – a crucial civic duty performed by the media – may actually descend into a crude form of entertainment that steers attention away from serious social and public issues. The third tension relates to the impressive efforts that have been made to improve ethical conduct by government and the observation that such efforts have not stopped the continuing cascade of high-profile political scandals (Basinger & Rottinghaus, 2012; Lull & Hinerman, 1997; Thompson, 2000, 2005). Public officials abide by an increasing number of rules, and their behaviour has arguably improved, but scandals still occur frequently. This paper argues that these three dialectical tensions are indicative of a politics of extreme visibility that features a series of heterogeneous and interrelated phenomena. Most forms of visibility addressed by tourism researchers are deemed to be desirable by tourism managers. Scandals, however, are an exception as they attract unwanted media attention.

Perhaps more than ever – especially after the collapse of Enron and the consequent restructuring of the global accountancy profession – organisations of every size and within different sectors must be aware that good reputations can evaporate when scandals strike (Brammer & Pavelin, 2006; Mahon & Wartick, 2003). The activities of public

organisations are increasingly scrutinised, the criteria used to assess institutional behaviour appear to have become more demanding (Grolin, 1998), and deviations from conventions and rules have become more politicised. Media and public appetites have been whetted by individual and organisational misdoings over the years; highly competitive media outlets identify transgressions, convey them to an audience of non-participants, and then sustain indignation until the controversy subsides, perhaps with a resignation or dismissal. The more that publicity becomes necessary in politics and commerce – and, as well, the more that the media makes the endeavours of public figures and organisations visible – the greater the possibility that meticulously crafted reputations and images start to clash with perceptions of actual behaviour (Thompson, 2000, 2005). This paper extends the exploration of scandals by addressing the diverse, interwoven phenomena that underpin politicised visibility as well as the manner in which scandal-related visibility differs from the forms of visibility typically studied by tourism researchers – for example, the visibility of certain sites to the tourist gaze (Robinson, 2012; Urry & Larsen, 2011) as well as marketing- and surveillance-related visibility (Canally & Carmichael, 2011; Gotham, 2002; Morgan & Pritchard, 2005; Pritchard & Morgan, 2006; Weaver, 2008).

The paper is divided into seven sections. The first section is this introduction. Second, a series of scholarly works that examine scandals, crisis management, tourism and ethics, the framing of news stories, and tourism-oriented visibility are reviewed. The third section provides a short summary of the merits of case study research as well as a brief description of the NPC and its recent economic performance. In the fourth, data collection and analysis are addressed. The fifth section examines the scandals that were reported by newspapers: a case of alleged expense account abuse, two situations where contracts were not tendered, and two instances where individuals were accused of conflicts of interest. Sixth, after analysing these scandals closely, three dialectical tensions emerged. These tensions are explored and their relationship with politics and media-generated visibility is addressed. A seventh and final section offers conclusions.

Literature review

Scandals, crises, and ethics

A series of scholarly works have examined the nature of scandals (Adut, 2005; Basinger & Rottinghaus, 2012; Lull & Hinerman, 1997; Neckel, 2005; Thompson, 2000, 2005). Scandals can be described as narratives that address actual or alleged events that, once publicised by the media, are met with a mixture of fascination and displeasure. High-status individuals – for example, prominent politicians and senior bureaucrats – are frequently at the centre of scandals (Adut, 2005; Basinger & Rottinghaus, 2012). The narratives connected with a scandal may be contested or disputed. Often the most important conflict that defines a scandal may be the conflict over whether misconduct actually took place (Neckel, 2005). Furthermore, trends in scandalisation reflect changes in social norms that move the threshold between 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate'.

Scandals are inseparable from the importance of image within contemporary politics. The expansion of the modern media has transported scandal into the realm of symbolic power (Lull & Hinerman, 1997; Thompson, 2000, 2005). Politics has become a series of battles oriented around appearances and perceptions, and scandals certainly reflect these phenomena. Press autonomy within Western-style democracies and the significant value of publicity within the political realm probably account for the present-day frequency of scandals (Thompson, 2000, 2005). Scandals can fade away as news stories and incidents are reported that take their place, a pattern consistent with the issue-attention cycle

(Downs, 1972; Hall, 2002). Publicised misdeeds can provoke strong reactions such as widespread condemnation that sometimes prompt consequential changes. A number of dismissals occurred at the NPC, for example, as a result of the scandals that were reported.

Efforts to depict certain incidents as scandals provide some individuals with a means of advancing their political power. When incidents are believed to stem from inappropriate behaviour within the public sector, there are potential political rewards for opposition parties seeking to win office (Boin, McConnell, & 't Hart, 2008; Bovens & 't Hart, 1996). There is political incentive for opposition parties to argue that the government has not performed competently. An incident that becomes noteworthy because it calls attention to serious problems – and may suggest scandal – could provide critics with a means to separate a government from its public support (Elder & Cobb, 1983). Such an incident may create an intense wave of disapproval and condemnation that may result in the scrutiny of particular individuals, organisations, and activities. There can be conflicting interpretations of incidents deemed to be scandalous that reflect the nature of adversarial politics. An incident can reflect certain agreed-upon occurrences but may also be politically constructed and inflated by those who wish to emphasise and exploit a government's perceived shortcomings (Edelman, 1988; Elder & Cobb, 1983).

Scandals can cause political crises, especially if the transgressions that are described by the media are perceived as serious. The management of crises has received attention from tourism scholars (Hall, 2010; Henderson, 2003; Laws & Prideaux, 2005; Ritchie, 2004). Crises are serious predicaments that are a departure from the norm, create uncertainty, and demand swift action. Scandals are one type of crisis, however, that has not been examined within the field of tourism studies. The defect – real or alleged – that exists at the core of a scandal requires some form of human action (or inaction) that contradicts accepted, ethical practices and thus invites harsh criticism and even outrage.

Scandals dramatise ethics and are frequently making an overarching statement about right and wrong (Adut, 2005). Researchers have explored a variety of ethical issues related to tourism. Ethical issues arise, for example, when tourism uses or consumes natural resources (Holden, 2005), the benefits of commercial tourism development are seen to be unfairly distributed (Jamal & Camargo, 2014), animals are incorporated into tourism products (Fennell, 2011; Shani & Pizam, 2008), tourists visit countries where human rights violations have occurred (Lovelock, 2008), and codes of conduct are developed for tourists and tourism operators (Fennell & Malloy, 2007). The appropriateness of (frequent) air travel has also been questioned (Cohen, Higham, & Reis, 2013; Holden, 2009). Scandals frequently involve a violation of certain ethical standards. In this paper, certain endeavours tied to the management of a tourism-related organisation – the use of an expense account, procedures regarding the way in which contracts were awarded, and perceived conflicts of interest – received scrutiny as they were seen to be ethically unacceptable by some.

The mass media, competing news frames, and visibility

Publicity is a necessary precondition for a scandal to emerge (Adut, 2005; Thompson, 2000, 2005). A media spectacle can occur when controversial actions, such as perceived ethics violations, become newsworthy events. The media shapes public affairs in economically advanced democracies (Edelman, 1988). It is instrumental in sustaining scandals when certain incidents are repeatedly recounted. Scandal revelations can help media outlets build their audiences. Such revelations may prompt a dispute about the way in which particular incidents are perceived.

Clashing perceptions of the same incidents related to a scandal – such as those associated with the management of an organisation – may be understood as framing contests between different stakeholders. There can be competing ways to frame the same situation. The concept of a news frame is an important feature of media analysis (Entman, 1993, 2004; Gitlin, 2003; Santos, 2005; Wu, Xue, Morrison, & Leung, 2012). It is a central organising idea or narrative account that provides coherent meaning. Underpinning a frame is a particular perspective or ideological belief. Framing is a political process in which politicians and media commentators aim to influence the opinions of an audience (Entman, 1993, 2004). There are conflicting interpretations of events – and thus competing frames – that reflect different political interests and ongoing battles between governing and opposition parties. Initially conceived by Goffman (1974) as an interpersonal theory about the manner in which individuals understand their own circumstances, media scholars have adapted the concept of framing to the study of newsworthy events.

Proponents of particular frames aim to ensure that their interpretation of events triumphs and receives support in the relevant political arenas. Entman (1993) explains that both selection and salience are crucial to media framing. Newspaper reporters, for example, select certain elements of an issue for the stories they write and then present those elements in a manner that they believe will be salient to their readers. To be successful, those who promote certain frames must be attuned to the systems of meaning that resonate with their audience members and are consistent with the social and political context in which the frames have been developed. The framing of certain incidents as scandals becomes a political act (Boin et al., 2008; Bovens & 't Hart, 1996). For example, efforts are often made by opposition party politicians to frame perceived misconduct as emblematic of widespread government ineptitude. A scandal, then, can be portrayed as merely one event that typifies broader attitudes and practices.

The attention devoted to scandals within the mass media and the news frames developed out of these scandals are symptomatic of the increased visibility of public figures and government activities apparent in many countries. Visibility is an important concept within the field of tourism studies. Tourism is an activity oriented around vision and visibility as suggested by the notion of the tourist gaze (Robinson, 2012; Urry & Larsen, 2011) and by the importance of images to those who market travel destinations (Canally & Carmichael, 2011; Gotham, 2002). Surveillance, an activity with connections to visibility, has also been addressed by tourism researchers (Morgan & Pritchard, 2005; Pritchard & Morgan, 2006; Weaver, 2008). Forms of visibility related to the very nature of tourism (such as sightseeing) as well as to the practice of commerce and the provision of security (e.g. marketing- and surveillance-related visibility) are typically viewed as desirable by tourism managers. The scandal-related visibility addressed in this paper, however, is frequently unwanted by those who manage organisations. This visibility – characterised by a series of tensions produced by heterogeneous, interwoven phenomena – has been fostered by the mass media and the politicisation of news frames.

The NPC: a case study

This paper presents the findings from a single case study. The aim of the research was compatible with a case study approach: conducting exploratory work in an area that has been under-researched (Creswell, 2013). A case study approach was deemed to be appropriate because the research involved understanding particular types of incidents (Creswell, 2013) – in this instance, scandals within an organisation that manages tourism resources.

An organisation, the NPC, that had a range of commercial functions and was scrutinised by opposition party politicians became a suitable vehicle for the study of scandals because of the way in which certain individuals within the organisation conducted business – that is, used an expense account, awarded contracts to service providers, and managed multiple (and possibly conflicting) interests. The alleged instances of misconduct (a number of separate actions by individuals) when combined with the NPC's economic challenges as well as the political environment (the broader set of circumstances) created conditions ripe for a scandal.

A series of scandals erupted between 2009 and 2011 at the NPC; each was related to the management of operations. There was no legal proof of criminal activity, only allegations of wrongdoing. In the scandals that were reported, both the accusers and accused tried to convey their interpretations of events. The accusers emphasised the magnitude of the incidents. They sought to frame the incidents within a wider context of government incompetence. Those accused of misconduct defended their actions vigorously. The visibility of the alleged misconduct can be attributed to the transparent nature of the NPC's operations – due to its connection with the Government of Ontario – as well as the autonomy of the press in Canada

The Government of Ontario granted broad legal and financial powers to the NPC in 1885. Its current responsibilities include the management and marketing of property adjacent to the Canadian Horseshoe Falls as well as various attractions situated along the Canadian side of the Niagara River (Figure 1). As a self-funded agency, it must generate its own revenue (Healy, 2006). The NPC is 'a private enterprise with a public mandate' (Reinhart, 2010f, p. A10). One researcher, in a study of tourism and common pool resources at Niagara Falls, described the NPC as a 'parastatal corporation' (Healy, 2006, p. 527). It is an organisation that performs entrepreneurial functions 'because it relies on restaurants,

Figure 1.   The Table Rock Welcome Centre is operated by the NPC and is situated next to the Canadian Horseshoe Falls. This centre contains shops, a food court, and an 'immersive' attraction – Niagara's Fury – that simulates the creation of Niagara Falls.
Source: Author's photograph.

attractions and gift shops for its revenue' and, at the same time, is answerable to government as a result of 'the stewardship role assigned by the [Province of Ontario]' (Larocque, 2011b, p. A1). Scandals can occur within a variety of contexts, and organisations that have some association with government bodies are frequently scrutinised by opposition party politicians and the mass media.

The day-to-day operations of the NPC are overseen by a senior management team that includes a general manager and a number of directors. Twelve individuals form the NPC's Board of Commissioners. The commissioners, in contrast to the members of the senior management team, are political appointees. These commissioners, among other tasks, define the duties of the senior management team, supervise the development and implementation of the agency's strategic plan, and ensure compliance with government legislation and policy (Cheevers, 2009). The Chair of the Board of Commissioners reports to Ontario's Minister of Tourism and Culture. Prominent individuals such as government ministers and other senior officials who are seen to occupy positions of responsibility and trust make attractive fodder for scandal.

Recent data indicate that, from a commercial standpoint, the NPC's performance has not been stellar. The tourism industry in the Niagara region of Canada did not fare well for a number of years after the final quarter of 2001 (Brooker & Burgess, 2008). Visitor numbers have decreased. The attractions and properties managed by the NPC have recently been deemed as suffering from 'stagnation and fatigue' (Brooker & Burgess, 2008, p. 283). The problems encountered by managers of the NPC include 'a lack of US customers who traditionally spend more than Canadian visitors' due to factors such as the strong Canadian dollar and 'the perception of continuing border crossing and traffic delays' (Vieira, 2010, p. 1). Visits by tourists from other, more distant international markets were 'down 14 percent' in 2009. These tourists 'generate 38 percent of all retail and 39 percent of all food revenues' (Vieira, 2010, p. 1). The economic challenges confronted by the NPC in 2009 and 2010 potentially made it vulnerable to media criticism. These challenges arguably created a sense that the organisation was not functioning as effectively as it could have been during difficult times. The scandals that are described in this paper represent the convergence of different interests and actions as well as certain contextual factors; they were more than simply the isolated acts of particular individuals.

Methods

Newspaper articles are the source of data used in this paper. It is through media-generated content that members of the public become acquainted with current events, including scandals. Newspaper articles often quote remarks made by individuals who accuse others of impropriety or are the targets of the accusations. Political rhetoric about scandals that reaches a wide audience is readily obtainable.

The articles that were analysed were published in both metropolitan and national newspapers in Canada – in particular, *The St. Catharines Standard*, *Niagara This Week*, *The Toronto Star*, and *The Globe and Mail*. Past issues of *The St. Catharines Standard* were accessed at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada. A ProQuest research database, *Canadian Newsstand Complete*, was used to access the articles from the other newspapers. The search term 'NPC' was used to identify relevant articles. In total, seventy-seven articles were examined. Thirty-four are cited in this paper.

The sample of newspaper articles used in this paper was 'purposeful' (Creswell, 2013, pp. 154–156). These articles were selected because they were information rich and could help one to understand a series of scandals at the NPC. The sample was not, and was not

intended to be, representative of a broader range of scandals in other contexts. In essence, 'extreme case sampling' (Suri, 2011, p. 67) was used. It is a type of purposeful sampling that identifies examples or situations that are anomalous and only meet certain criteria (in this case, scandals within a particular organisation).

The texts of newspaper articles were subjected to a form of discourse analysis. Persistent patterns were identified through this qualitative approach (Antaki, 2008; Bryman, 2008). The process of analysis commenced with the careful reading and re-reading of the newspapers articles in order to understand some of the recent controversies that had occurred at the NPC. It was initially determined that the scandals could be grouped into three categories. First, one of the scandals occurred because of the way in which an expense account was used. A second category included two separate incidents where contracts were not properly tendered. Third, two alleged conflicts of interest involving officials at the NPC were identified.

Each of the scandals was mentioned in multiple articles and quite often an article that addressed a particular scandal in some depth would briefly reference previous and unrelated scandals at the NPC. Past scandals were therefore revisited repeatedly (if often only fleetingly) as subsequent scandals developed. The notion that these scandals reflect a politics of extreme visibility started to emerge as an important theme when it became clear that each scandal could be connected to broader narratives about the consequences of highly publicised incidents of alleged misconduct, the role of the mass media within contemporary society, and the politicisation of ethics within the public sector. Consistent with discourse analysis, relationships were uncovered – in this instance, dialectical tensions – that operate beneath the surface of taken-for-granted meanings.

Newspaper articles may be selective chronicles of events (Stokowski, 2011) but they do have value to scholars who study scandals. They are an accessible arena for conflicting interpretations of the same incidents. In one instance, an individual who was mentioned in various newspaper articles about the NPC, Joel Noden, wrote to a newspaper in order to provide his own account of certain events (Noden, 2010). It was also the case that interviews with some of the main participants would have been difficult, if not impossible, to obtain. Noden, who was implicated in the expense account controversy, indicated to journalists that he would not make himself available for subsequent interviews about incidents that took place at the NPC (Beech, 2010; Reinhart, 2010b). A second potential key informant – a former member of the NPC's Board of Commissioners named Archie Katzman who was accused of conflicts of interest – consented to media interviews in early 2010 but then 'declined comment' by the end of the year (Spiteri, 2010, p. A1). The newspaper articles that feature statements made by Noden and Katzman are, at present, the only way to access their accounts of their actions.

Divergent interpretations of the data are possible because the prior knowledge, experiences, and expertise of different researchers vary. One way to demonstrate the plausibility of a particular interpretation is to provide direct quotations so that readers are able to observe the connections between data and analysis. Exemplar quotations were selected for their relevance and clarity. This practice is consistent with other published works that use qualitative data (O'Brien, 2010). Moreover, carefully chosen quotations add expressive richness to the paper.

Controversies at the NPC

Expense account abuse

The NPC received a considerable amount of media attention when the organisation's director of revenue operations, marketing, and business development claimed nearly $400,000 in

work-related expenses between 2006 and 2009. Newspaper reporters described the expenses of this individual, Joel Noden, as 'controversial' (Larocque, 2010f, p. A1) and 'rather exorbitant' (Herod, 2010, p. A3). These expenses included a ticket for a roller coaster ride in Las Vegas and $200 worth of ice wine purchased as gifts for visiting Chinese officials (Larocque, 2010f; Noden, 2010). Elected representatives from the two opposition parties in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario – the Progressive Conservative (PC) Party of Ontario and the Ontario New Democratic Party (NDP) – were critical of Noden and the NPC. Peter Kormos, a Member of the Provincial Parliament (MPP) for the NDP, stated that Noden and other executives used the NPC as a 'personal ATM [automated teller machine]' (Larocque, 2010c, p. A7). The leader of the NDP, Andrea Horwath, described business trips Noden took to Las Vegas, paid for by the NPC, as 'expensive Vegas vacations' (Cheevers, 2010, p. 1). 'Ontario families', in her words, 'were literally taken for a ride' (Reinhart, 2010a, p. A6). Although the NPC does not need taxpayers' money – it earns enough revenue to support its own operations – the organisation was still depicted as squandering money that could have been used by government for other purposes.

One MPP for the PC Party claimed that 'eHealth-style rot' had permeated the NPC (Larocque, 2010e, p. A4). The eHealth Ontario scandal tarnished the reputation of Premier Dalton McGuinty's provincial government in 2009 when an agency within the Ministry of Health, eHealth Ontario, was seen to have wasted over $1 billion in a failed attempt to create a comprehensive electronic health records system (Elliott, 2010; Larocque, 2010f). This waste was associated with the purchase of inadequate computer systems, the hiring of unnecessary consultants, and bestowing untendered contracts. The scandal prompted the resignation of Ontario's Minister of Health at the time, David Caplan. Newspaper reporters compared Noden's actions at the NPC to one other controversy that had recently posed problems for Ontario's Liberal government: inappropriate use of expense accounts by officials at the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Commission (Larocque, 2010f). Even Ontario's Minister of Tourism and Culture, Michael Chan, admitted that Noden's behaviour reflected 'a troubling corporate culture' within the NPC (Reinhart, 2010c, p. A7).

Noden was accused of abusing the expense regime that enabled him to perform his duties. The PC Party and NDP sought to create a picture of a government that was a poor manager of money. Opposition party politicians and some newspaper reporters tried to portray – or frame – the government as one that repeatedly wasted money. One way that members of the PC Party tried to increase the potency of their framing efforts was by connecting the frames they developed about the NPC with other incidents, including the 'eHealth scandal' (Elliott, 2010, p. A10). In contrast, the Minister of Tourism and Culture constructed a frame that only directed blame at the NPC's practices. Problems within the organisation were not portrayed by Chan as emblematic of larger, systemic failures. The government criticised the behaviour that was under scrutiny but presented an alternative explanation of its causes, one that attributed the incident with the expense account to circumstances specific to the NPC (its 'troubling corporate culture'). If a government admits that certain incidents are a function of widespread problems, there may be requests for a serious investigation because 'big' problems require 'big' solutions – for example, a formal inquiry or a major bureaucratic reorganisation. The weight of the questions asked becomes heavier, and the number and prominence of the individuals whose behaviour is scrutinised increase.

Noden vehemently defended his actions in the media. He noted that his expense claims were consistent with agency protocols. His expenses were, in his words, 'consistently approved' (Noden, 2010, p. A2); they were not identified as a problem at the time (that is, between 2006 and 2009) when they were assessed by auditors (Reinhart, 2010a).

A rollercoaster ride, for someone who spearheads product development initiatives, could be seen as a necessary work-related expense. Sampling other tourism products has been conceptualised by scholars as part of the product development and benchmarking process (Kozak, 2004, p. 152). Noden played an important role in the development of Niagara's Fury, an attraction at the Table Rock Welcome Centre next to the Canadian Horseshoe Falls (Conradi & Williscraft, 2010). This simulation-based attraction recreates the formation of Niagara Falls through the use of visual effects, temperature changes, artificial snow, and a floor that can move in a controlled fashion. Therefore, making expense claims for visits to tourist attractions is not necessarily an inappropriate practice for someone whose job title includes the words 'business development'. Noden (2010, p. A2) indicated that 'in each year of [his] tenure with the NPC, the departments [he] oversaw generated excess revenue over expense ("profit") and operated like a successful business'.

The purchase of the ice wine for members of a Chinese delegation could be seen as gift giving that was part of strategic relationship building. Gift giving within a commercial context is not out of the ordinary (Chan, Denton, & Tsang, 2003). There was also confusion about some of Noden's other expenses. For example, a $1800 expense claim was made for a credit-card purchase that was simply described as 'Oxford Pub/Nightclub' (Reinhart, 2010b, p. A11). The leader of the NDP indicated that this expense was a 'nightclub tab' (Reinhart, 2010a, p. A6). Noden described the expense as a bill received from Oxford Publishing, a company that produces *Nightclub & Bar Magazine* and organises 'trade shows for the hospitality industry' (Reinhart, 2010b, p. A11).

Noden had a vocal supporter. His actions were defended by Jim Williams, a former Chair of the NPC's Board of Commissioners (Williams, 2010). A significant problem for Noden was that procedures governing expense claims changed after he made his claims. His expense claims were submitted 'before September 2009, when the Liberals brought in new rules governing what kind of travel, meal and hospitality expenses are permitted' (Larocque, 2010a, p. A7). Past audits of the NPC's expenses, according to Noden and Williams, never mentioned inappropriate expenditure (Noden, 2010; Williams, 2010). A police investigation completed in 2012 'cleared the Niagara Parks Commission of criminal activity around its expenses and procurement practices' (Conradi, 2012, p. 1).

In an era of budgetary pressure, Noden's expenditures were heavily criticised by opposition party politicians and by commentators within the print media. Perceptions of poor financial management may be influenced by context. Spending that is consistent with acting entrepreneurially – and may therefore be unconventional – could attract increased scrutiny at a time of fiscal restraint. Some of the spending and entrepreneurial practices undertaken by the NPC were seen to be undisciplined and lacking political accountability.

Untendered contracts

In April of 2008, the NPC's Board of Commissioners voted to renew the contract of the company that operates the Maid of the Mist boat tour. This tour takes passengers close to both the American Falls and the Canadian Horseshoe Falls. The company that had the contract at the time, the Maid of the Mist Steamship Company, had held it for over 160 years and the commissioners believed that they had the authority to make a decision regarding its renewal as they had done in the past (Hutton, 2012; Reinhart, 2009a). However, 'Ontario's Liberal government decreed in 2009 that all contracts be subject to a bidding process' (Larocque, 2011a, p. A10). The government therefore required compulsory competitive tendering. This decision was part of a broader initiative to improve public sector

procurement. Procurement processes, it was argued, needed to be transparent. Competitive tendering was seen to have greater procedural integrity than a decision made by the NPC's Board of Commissioners.

The boat operator's contract that had been renewed was subsequently voided. This reversal of the Board of Commissioners' decision prompted the resignation of its Chair, Jim Williams. He expressed 'grave concerns' about tendering the contract competitively because of 'safety, legal and financial risks in choosing a new operator over Maid of the Mist' (Reinhart, 2009a, p. A18). For one member of the board, Ed Werner, the process of competitive tendering that had been adopted would restrict innovation because 'private ideas [would become] public in the interest of fair competition' (Baulcomb, 2010, p. 1). This process, in his view, would 'stop anyone coming to [the NPC] with unique ideas' (Herod, 2010, p. A3). Efforts to ensure professionalism, fairness, and accountability could therefore undermine entrepreneurialism. A Ministry of Finance audit conducted in June of 2011 that reviewed procurement practices at the NPC recommended that an open tendering process be implemented (Conradi, 2011).

The incident involving the Maid of the Mist contract was not the only NPC-related scandal attributable to the absence of a tendering process. During Noden's tenure at the NPC, some additional funding was received 'for the production and distribution of a 100-page glossy magazine meant to lure tourists to the Niagara area from around Southern Ontario' (Reinhart, 2010e, p. A8). The contract was not tendered. Rather, it was immediately awarded to a Niagara Falls-based publisher, REV Publishing. Financial support for the making and dissemination of the magazine was received in late spring and there was an urgent need to print it for the start of the summer holiday season (Conradi & Williscraft, 2010). One reason for the selection of REV Publishing was that it had 'exclusive rights to [the] GO boxes, and those GO boxes are a key vehicle in terms of distribution of those magazines' (Conradi & Williscraft, 2010, p. 1). The 'GO boxes' are situated in GO bus and train stations throughout southern Ontario. GO Transit is the name of the regional public transit service that operates in many parts of southern Ontario – in particular, the Greater Toronto Area. The Minister of Tourism and Culture granted the NPC an exemption from the government's procurement rule in this instance (Conradi & Williscraft, 2010, p. 1).

Seeking competitive bids for a contract could be an impediment to profiting from a sudden and significant business opportunity. Time was scarce in this case. Nevertheless, the incident that involved REV Publishing prompted Ted Arnott, a PC Party MPP, to state that 'sole-sourced contracts continue to thrive under the McGuinty government' (Larocque, 2010b, p. A8). The decision not to tender the magazine contract was also questioned by the chief executive officer of the St. Catharines-Thorold Chamber of Commerce, Walter Sendzik, and the Chair of the NPC's Board of Commissioners at the time, Fay Booker (Larocque, 2010b). Competitive tendering presents a dilemma: it can potentially facilitate and constrain enterprise at the same time. Expediency and exploiting a sudden and significant business opportunity can come into conflict with efforts to distribute contracts fairly and find the best service provider at the best price.

Conflicts of interest

Much has been written about conflicts of interest in fields such as politics, business, education, and medicine (Davis & Stark, 2001). Increased media and public scrutiny has created a greater awareness of situations involving conflicts of interest. Such conflicts, a major topic of debate in the public sphere, are situations where individuals possess interwoven affiliations and responsibilities that could create opportunities for corruption and

nepotism. The appearance of bias is a significant problem for those in positions of public trust (Davis & Stark, 2001; Trost & Gash, 2008). An interest, whether potential or actual, has the potential to interfere with the performance of duty. It is difficult to distance oneself from conflict-of-interest allegations once accusations are made.

Two individuals associated with the NPC were accused of various conflicts of interest: Fay Booker, the Chair of the Board of Commissioners between 2010 and 2011, and Archie Katzman, a commissioner since 1971. Booker was accused of having a conflict of interest when the NPC hired an accountancy firm to audit its accounts that had formerly employed her. Booker's involvement in the selection of the firm was framed by some as a conflict of interest. It 'rais[ed] eyebrows among some commissioners' (Larocque, 2011c, p. A2); she was seen to be favouring the interests of a past employer. Booker denied that there was a conflict of interest because she was no longer employed by the accountancy firm. A PC Party MPP, Ted Arnott, accused Booker of a conflict of interest because she allegedly 'handed out a sweetheart deal to friends at her former firm' (Larocque, 2010e, p. A4). Furthermore, Arnott and colleagues from his political party 'made . . . hay out of the fact that [Booker] made donations to Liberal candidates in the past' (Larocque, 2011b, p. A1).

The Minister of Tourism and Culture vigorously defended Booker. Her appointment is repeatedly framed by the Minister as a step that would introduce much-needed reforms. Booker was appointed by him to 'clean up the agency' (Reinhart, 2010c, p. A7). When two PC Party MPPs, Ted Arnott and Jim Wilson, accused Booker of various misdeeds – including conflicts of interest – the Minister accused these politicians of conducting a 'misinformation campaign' against her and demanded that they apologise to her for statements they had made (Larocque, 2010d, p. A5). She was framed as a problem by the PC Party MPPs but, at the same time, portrayed as the solution to a problem – the management of the NPC – by the Minister.

For some observers, Archie Katzman had a number of conflicts of interest as a NPC commissioner and is guilty of structuring his mutually influencing roles to serve his own agenda. Katzman has been described by NDP MPP Peter Kormos as an 'old-time power broker' and 'backroom man' (Reinhart, 2010f, p. A10). Other terms have been used to characterise Katzman: 'veteran political bagman' (Reinhart, 2010d, p. A1) and 'civic booster' (Reinhart, 2010f, p. A10). One of his sons owns 'a St. Catharines telecom franchise' that 'services the park staff's mobile phone system' (Reinhart, 2010f, p. A10). A building contractor named Don Ward, who has obtained several construction contracts from the NPC, at one time owned the mortgage for a residential property occupied by Katzman (Reinhart, 2010f).

Katzman is a prominent member of the Niagara Falls community and has received awards from various community organisations. For Katzman, relationships between himself and others that have been framed as conflicts of interest represent 'life in close-knit Niagara' (Reinhart, 2010f, p. A10). A person is bound to have many personal contacts over an extended period of service to an organisation. Katzman 'survived' 11 provincial elections, seven premiers, and the governments of three different political parties as an NPC commissioner (Reinhart, 2010f, p. A10). His service to the NPC received written praise from Premier McGuinty in November 2010 (Downs, 2010). Within a month, however, he was dismissed from his role as a commissioner as a result of the alleged conflicts of interest.

That Katzman has accumulated a tremendous amount of experience over the years is taken by some observers as an indicator that he possesses knowledge that is useful to an organisation such as the NPC. It is also Katzman's connections with the Niagara Falls community that made him a frequently re-appointed commissioner. However, businesspeople

can be prone to breach conflict-of-interest regulations in quasi-public sector positions because of their significant private interests. Katzman has, by some accounts, advanced the interests of family members and friends improperly. A complex problem appears to emerge when one sees that his 'connections' within the community – the reason for the conflict-of-interest allegations – also explain his repeated re-appointment to the NPC's Board of Commissioners.

Discussion

The scandals identified in this paper suggest that there is a complex politics of extreme visibility. Three dialectical tensions emerge as features of this type of politics when newspaper articles about alleged misdeeds were analysed carefully. That a politics of extreme visibility is thought to exist is consistent with the purpose and scope of discourse analysis: studying texts in an interpretative fashion and making connections between their content and the way in which society and its social structures operate. The first tension that is identified addresses the symbolic and image-oriented aspects of scandals (Lull & Hinerman, 1997; Thompson, 2000, 2005) and their more concrete implications – namely, the dismissals that occurred. Words, and the perspectives or frames they convey, do not simply form texts that have no material impact. The fate of politicians and managers may be determined by the way in which events unfold. When incidents become noteworthy enough to arouse collective concern, some sort of catharsis is seen to be required to alleviate it – perhaps the resignation or dismissal of a prominent politician or bureaucrat who is deemed to be responsible for the problem. Seemingly disparate phenomena – a reputation or image that is intangible and tangible, material ramifications – can be co-present.

A second tension is related to media sensationalism and the role of the media as an entity that watches over society's institutions. Sensationalism sells newspapers; contemporary political rhetoric often involves continuous partisan sniping (Edelman, 1988). However, despite appealing to prurient interest at times, the media serves a vital function in free and democratic societies. The Watergate scandal is a prototype of a scandal that helps to justify journalism and its practice of investigative inquiry (Marshall, 2011; Thompson, 2005). Scandals can entrap miscreants and become an effective means of social control used against culprits in positions of power. Third, widespread awareness of scandals and their consequences – and an increase in the standard of acceptable behaviour in government office – exists in tension with the continued occurrence of scandals. There is arguably a sense that scandals have become more common in contemporary politics (Basinger & Rottinghaus, 2012; Lull & Hinerman, 1997; Thompson, 2005). That scandals continue to take place and have possibly increased in frequency comes up against the phenomenon that there is heightened sensitivity to issues related to ethics and character within the political domain and that rules and regulations within the public sector have probably been as strict as they have ever been.

The three tensions that are identified manifest themselves across the different scandals addressed in this paper. Each tension has a clear visibility-related dimension to it. Creating the type of visibility associated with scandals can be part of a strategy used by politicians to undermine the reputations of their opponents. Such efforts can have serious consequences for those whose careers suffer. The visibility created by media sensationalism is a source of potential distractions for the public but also serves an important societal function. Scandal-related visibility has the potential to both trivialise political issues and address matters that have substance. Even though the implications of scandal-related visibility are apparent – for example, resignations or dismissals that take place – the sheer volume of scandals

has not appeared to have decreased. Heightened visibility often means that past actions are assessed vis-à-vis current, revised standards. In other words, the threshold between scandal and non-scandal is shifting. The various tensions that are examined suggest that the extreme visibility that is generated by scandals is underpinned by a series of diverse phenomena that intersect each other. Visibility related to scandals – unsolicited and undesirable – is different from the forms of visibility that are usually viewed positively by tourism managers – in other words, the visibility associated with tourists' visits and sightseeing, marketing-related images, and surveillance that serves either a commercial or security-related function.

The symbolic power and concrete consequences of scandal

Symbolic power has always been central to politics but it has gained tremendous significance as the mass media has become more influential. This form of power is shaped by highly visible media spectacles, including scandals. Scandals, however, do not simply have implications for the realm of symbols – that is, words and images. They affect people. Scandals can have dire consequences for the individuals who are accused of transgressions. Revelations may prompt resignations and dismissals to take place.

Constructing and disseminating persuasive narratives are central to shaping perceptions of scandal-related incidents. Politicians and other stakeholders develop accounts about their own actions, and they defend or criticise the accounts of others. Words are used to frame problems, magnify or downplay the seriousness of particular events, generate political support, and create favourable or unfavourable responses towards government action (Edelman, 1988; Elder & Cobb, 1983). Whether the scope of a particular scandal expands or contracts may be a function of the extent to which certain themes and issues command attention. Politicians, managers, and media commentators try to craft narratives and images that best serve their agenda. The scandals discussed in this paper were related to the operation of symbolic power in that both the accusers and the alleged culprits tried to court the public through the media. People such as Joel Noden, Fay Booker, and Archie Katzman disputed the accusations made against them personally; Jim Williams and Ed Werner defended controversial decisions made by the NPC's Board of Commissioners, a body of which they had been members. The media became a forum for competing interpretations of various events.

There are also, however, tangible consequences associated with scandals. Expeditiously finding a culprit and punishing that individual – perhaps through dismissal – is a means of establishing that the problems associated with a scandal have been addressed. It is not only reputations that suffer when scandals strike; people do too. When misconduct is believed to have taken place, the fate of politicians, employees, and certain practices is at stake. Their fate may be determined by the way in which events unfold. Noden indicates that he was 'dismissed without any legal cause' in 2010, a claim no one appears to have disputed (Noden, 2010, p. A2). Four members of the NPC's Board of Commissioners, including Katzman, were promptly relieved of their duties in 2010. In political terms, they had become a problem for Ontario's provincial government. These four commissioners were viewed as a political burden as the NPC came under increased scrutiny. The leader of the NDP indicated that the NPC 'is an organisation that needs to clean house' (Reinhart, 2010a, p. A6). Removing certain individuals from positions of responsibility may be viewed as 'a knee-jerk reaction' (Wallace, 2010, p. A6) by some but it is perceived by others as a means 'to restore public confidence' (Tyler, 2010, p. A12). Within political circles, forcing a cabinet minister or senior bureaucrat to step down is often seen as a

more significant achievement for an opposition party than addressing the problem(s) that provoked the resignation.

The distracting nature and civic value of scandals

Political disputes and salacious media content can potentially divert public attention away from important social concerns. Continuous partisan combat is distinguished by repeated character assassination. In their efforts to engage and entertain their audiences, the presumption of innocence has almost been reversed when accusations are widely publicised. Politicians and bureaucrats at the centre of a scandal can be tried and convicted by the media. The argument for the detrimental effects of scandals might also stress that they are often a mixture of true and false accusations, and errors can never be completely corrected once they are published.

There is a tendency for media outlets to portray a scandal as a straightforward story and the product of individual actions involving named culprits rather than the product of broader problems and system-oriented failings. The 'naming and shaming' of Joel Noden – a single individual – was not accompanied by more in-depth efforts to scrutinise (the absence of) procedures used to monitor expense accounts within the NPC. Problems within the organisation were often swiftly personified. The absence of proper oversight with respect to expense accounts was potentially due to the need of the NPC to operate in a more entrepreneurial fashion, and to perhaps do so urgently because of the economic challenges it confronted with respect to visitor numbers and revenue. A culture of blame and scandal that typically targets people-as-perpetrators may be a distraction that masks problems with systems and processes.

That scandals are so intensely visible could be seen as creating unnecessary distractions but they also play an important role in ensuring that politicians and bureaucrats are responsible for their actions. Scandals expose a fundamental tension between the role of the media as the venue for political theatre and as an institution that identifies deficiencies with respect to governance. During the course of the scandals described in this paper, opposition party politicians demanded resignations and used evocative language that tried to depict certain events as indicative of wider incompetence or untrustworthiness. Business trips taken by Noden were, as already noted, described colourfully as 'expensive Vegas vacations' (Cheevers, 2010, p. 1) whereby taxpayers were 'taken for a ride' (Reinhart, 2010a, p. A6). A small number of incidents involving untendered contracts were seen as indicative of an unsavoury practice that 'continue[s] to thrive' (Larocque, 2010b, p. A8). Those accused of conflicts of interest were depicted as dubious characters: one (Booker) was seen as providing former colleagues with 'a sweetheart deal' (Larocque, 2010e, p. A4) and Katzman, in a separate set of circumstances, was described as a 'veteran political bagman' (Reinhart, 2010f, p. A10).

Scandals can be seen as forming the core of a type of politics where citizens are entertained and amused by the harsh remarks made by politicians and commentators, not informed and persuaded. There is a risk that scandals will displace social and collective issues from the public agenda. Criticism of government, however, is part of the function of the press. It is often only through scandals reported in the media that serious matters such as those addressed in this paper – the (mis)use of an expense account, the way in which contracts are awarded, and conflicts of interest – come into the public consciousness. Scandals arguably provide a space for discussing and debating politics and ethical practice, thus ensuring that a broad public has a degree of connection with the political sphere. Representative democracy is a political system oriented around distrust of power and the

powerful – for example, by disseminating statements made by opposition party politicians – and the mass media contribute to the process of holding those who govern accountable. The publicity that accompanies scandals ensures that politicians and bureaucrats remain vigilant about the way in which they behave.

Heightened awareness of ethics violations and the continued prevalence of scandals

Politicians and bureaucrats have become increasingly sensitive to issues of ethics. Heroic steps have been taken to make the political system more open and honest. Past incidents have prompted improvements (Marshall, 2011). As the scandals addressed in this paper demonstrate, governments operate their own investigatory processes that sometimes have to take aim at other government entities. The scandals involving Noden's expense account and the awarding of contracts without tendering, for example, prompted a series of audits. The mere appearance of impropriety or bias – such as conflicts of interest – typically invites serious scrutiny by the media and government officials. That Katzman allegedly gave preferential treatment to family members and associates prompted his dismissal from the NPC's Board of Commissioners. That misconduct can become so widely visible within the media and be exposed by government organisations has arguably made politicians and bureaucrats more circumspect (Garment, 1991).

Despite the greater potential for misconduct to be rendered visible by the media and government bodies, there is rarely a sense that the number of scandals is decreasing (Basinger & Rottinghaus, 2012; Thompson, 2000, 2005). Central to the emergence of some scandals is shifting standards. Events that have been taking place over many years may become constructed as scandalous. The boundary between 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' actions can shift as the political climate evolves (Thompson, 2005). Noden's past expenses were re-scrutinised by the media and politicians at a time of fiscal restraint. As a result, some of his expenditures seemed excessive. Untendered contracts, in many contexts, have become unacceptable. Contracts that were never before tendered must, at present, be tendered. Managing conflicts of interest has become more important within the contemporary political environment as many societies have become more sensitive to improprieties involving inappropriate interactions between the public sector and business interests.

Heightened visibility means that politicians are more exposed to criticism for both their current and past actions. Previous practices may suddenly be revisited and rendered highly visible to the gaze of a horrified public. Scandals simply need to be shocking to the audience of the day. There is always potential for activities once seen as 'proper' management practice to be redefined as 'scandalous' when the portrayal of such activities as exemplars of malfeasance serves political ends.

Conclusion

Visibility and tourism are intertwined in a variety of ways. That tourism has been structured by various gazes that render places and people highly visible has been explored by researchers (Robinson, 2012; Urry & Larsen, 2011). Building a competitive tourism sector requires the creation of the necessary infrastructure to make tourists comfortable and, as well, developing visible, marketable images (Canally & Carmichael, 2011; Gotham, 2002). Surveillance-related studies demonstrate that the means of making people visible has been expanding and changing at a rapid rate in recent years (Morgan & Pritchard, 2005; Pritchard & Morgan, 2006; Weaver, 2008). A different type of visibility – different from that connected with the tourist gaze, image-driven marketing, or surveillance – is addressed in

this paper. The publicity that accompanies scandals renders the actions of politicians and other officials highly visible to the public. However, scandal-related visibility is not the same as the other forms of visibility examined by tourism scholars. The visibility that accompanies scandals is usually unwanted by tourism managers. In contrast, visibility related to sightseeing, marketing, and surveillance is seen to be desirable for reasons related to commerce and security.

The visibility associated with scandals exposes a series of dialectical tensions that exhibit the complex character of media-disseminated transgressions. Power relations and political activity are increasingly connected with media-related visibility as are the means of making (mainly prominent) people and certain (noteworthy) events intensely visible. However, the implications of this visibility – as demonstrated by this paper – are by no means simple and straightforward. Patterns and themes that emerged through the analysis of newspaper articles run up against very different patterns and themes that were also present. Despite the series of tensions that were seen to exist – and the range of heterogeneous phenomena responsible for creating these tensions – a fundamental irony underpins the scandals that were examined: an organisation that sought certain forms of visibility for its tourism attractions also became burdened by visibility – in particular, scandal-related visibility. Visibility, in very broad terms, can benefit tourism organisations as well as pose a threat to the way in which they operate.

In the future, there is scope to explore a range of issues related to politics, visibility, and tourism. Tourism organisations, and those who manage them, possess the capacity to recover their reputations if they have been sullied by publicised allegations of misconduct. In order to address these allegations, politicians and managers will want to foster a sense that the perceived problem has been resolved. A frequent response to accusations of wrongdoing is to implement stricter controls, institute measures that enhance accountability, and even dismiss – or swiftly accept the resignation of – those deemed to be responsible or in charge. Revised standards and codes of conduct may be introduced, and rhetoric about answerability to citizens or consumers probably intensifies. Remedial action can take a variety of different forms. The way adopted reforms and changes affect perceptions of an organisation's performance, possibly prompting a restoration of previously forfeited trust, is worthy of investigation. Steps taken by decision makers after a scandal have the potential to change externally held views regarding the reputation of the organisation as well its internal culture.

Tourism scholars could also examine the politicised nature of policy triumphs as opposed to instances of alleged impropriety and scandal. Similar to an incident that creates a scandal, there may be varying interpretations of a so-called successful initiative. Errors and missteps, in the political realm, are often easily remembered while accomplishments that are seen favourably can sometimes be quickly forgotten or taken for granted. Experiences associated with success may offer opportunities to examine certain management practices. Managing accolades and popular achievements, for example, is probably quite different from managing the fallout from a scandal.

When poor management that has some connection with a public sector organisation is believed to have taken place, governments are vulnerable. This vulnerability deserves more research as there may be, for example, instances where election outcomes have been influenced by tourism-related scandals that have received considerable media exposure. However, political vulnerability may decrease over time. The ephemeral nature of some scandals may produce only a temporary climate of opinion in which change is seen to be necessary while the repetition of other types of scandals – ones that fit a particular mould – perhaps produces a fatigue that declines into cynicism or acceptance. Publicity associated with certain scandals eventually starts to dwindle.

Newspaper reports about the various scandals at the NPC had decreased in number significantly by the middle of 2011. The issue-attention cycle described by Downs (1972; Hall, 2002) conceptualises the massive amount of media attention that is generated by particular issues as well as the subsequent ebbing of public interest as other issues achieve prominence. One issue that emerged in the middle of 2011 that may have caused the scandals noted in this paper to disappear from most newspapers was the effort by Nik Wallenda to secure permission for a tightrope walk above Niagara Falls (Woods, 2011), a feat he achieved in June of 2012. News stories about the NPC were predominantly about Wallenda's proposed stunt and the debate it provoked between the time the idea became public knowledge and the actual occurrence of the event. Waxing and waning media coverage about incidents that generate controversy may therefore have implications for tourism development and the organisations that drive this development.

Premier McGuinty won a subsequent provincial election in October of 2011, albeit a minority government, after securing two consecutive legislative majorities (in other words, winning the majority of electoral seats in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario) in 2003 and 2007. He subsequently announced his resignation as Premier after nine years in office in October of 2012. It would be difficult to argue that the various scandals at the NPC were amongst the main factors responsible for McGuinty's inability to establish a third majority government. However, the scandals that occurred posed some serious challenges for the Minister of Tourism and Culture and prompted the dismissal of four members of the NPC's Board of Commissioners as well as a director of revenue operations, marketing, and business development. Unwelcome publicity about the operation of the NPC could have – in association with a number of other controversies – weakened support for the Liberals during the provincial election in 2011.

Although a case study implies an example or situation that is specific and bound to context, it can help one arrive at a deeper understanding of certain issues (Yin, 2009). This paper has addressed the dialectical tensions that underpinned certain scandals. There is certainly scope for further research to explore the way in which scandals manifest themselves in places that differ in many crucial cultural and institutional respects from Canada. Other dialectical tensions – and other phenomena tied to scandal-related visibility – could possibly come to the fore in studies performed elsewhere.

Regardless of the context studied, however, political controversies that involve the management of tourism do not occur within a vacuum. Tourism is one of many public policy arenas where publicised disputes can take place between those who govern and those who wish to govern. Continuing to explore the political nature of scandals has considerable merit in terms of advancing theory (e.g. exploring different manifestations of visibility within contemporary, media-saturated societies) and practice (e.g. the management of organisations under scrutiny and stress).

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