

The Canoe Is the People CD-ROM - Indigenous Navigation in the Pacific

Brief statement to the Sustainable Sea Transport conference, Suva, Fiji

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Firstly, I would like to congratulate the organizers of this event for an excellent and timely initiative – and to thank you all for the opportunity to say a few words this morning about *The Canoe Is the People*.

As I am sure is well known to all present, at the time when most European sailors were still hugging the coast, the island peoples of the Pacific held the knowledge and skills to explore the great ocean paths around and beyond their homes.

Instruments of navigation common today did not exist - no compasses, no radio, no radar, no GPS. The Pacific peoples navigated their canoes with their own sophisticated techniques, using the seas, skies, and sea life to guide them.

First released in CD format in 2005, *The Canoe Is the People* is an interactive electronic resource designed to honor and explore the knowledge and skills of traditional Pacific navigation. It is designed for Pacific youth but will be of great interest to others as well. An interactive online version of the CD is currently under preparation, and will soon be available from the UNESCO website.

The cultures of the Pacific are diverse. For this reason, the story of navigation has many faces and is told in many ways. *The Canoe Is the People* celebrates the similarities and the differences in these traditions. The focus is on the island of Satawal in the Caroline Islands of the Federated States of Micronesia, where navigational knowledge is still very much alive, but there have also been substantial contributions from the Cook Islands and New Zealand. The CD-ROM also involves many examples from other parts of the Pacific.

In terms of content, the resource is built around five major components (Beginnings, Canoes & Sailing, Becoming a Navigator, Navigating, Voyages & Revival). Users are taken on a voyage from the very beginnings of the Pacific Islands and their discovery and occupation, through the challenges of building a canoe and becoming a navigator, to accounts of the modern-day exploits of Pacific voyagers and voyaging societies. Furthermore, the resource includes detailed additional information: A glossary; museum and book references; as well as the full printable text version. As such, it also acts as a reference resource helping local communities identify and gain access to a selection of archival materials lodged in distant locations. In this way, it contributes to a process of restitution of data to communities.

The CD-ROM responds to one of goals of UNESCO's LINKS (Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems) programme - revitalizing the transmission of indigenous knowledge by strengthening the dialogue between elders and youth. Electronic media are recognized as powerful vehicles for traditional knowledge and the bolstering of oral traditions. The resource includes 70 videos, 41 stories and accounts, 40 images and diagrams, of which 11 are animated, in addition to numerous maps, photos and texts.

The resource is primarily intended to serve as an educational tool illustrating the vitality of indigenous knowledge, know-how, and identity in meaningful ways for Pacific communities.

In order to facilitate its use in Pacific island schools, a “Learners Resource Pack” is currently being finalized by UNESCO. A comprehensive and flexible educational package, the Pack consists of a Teacher’s Guide and Learner’s text. Designed on the basis of a review of five Pacific school curricula and tested by teachers in the Cook Islands at both primary and secondary level, the Pack facilitates the classroom use of the resource and its contents – also in schools where computer facilities and internet access are limited. UNESCO looks forward to working with the Pacific educational community towards making full use of the resource in Pacific schools, as well as to explore the opportunities for eventual integration into curricula.

I am encouraged and grateful for the interest in this resource shown by the organizers of this conference, and I look forward to exploring further with you ways in which the strengthening of local and indigenous knowledge transmission may help to advance the search for sustainable sea transport alternative in tomorrow’s Pacific.