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See table of contents

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'Community-based' as a Culturally Appropriate Concept of Development: a Case Study from Pangnirtung, Northwest Territories

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Richard F. Salisbury Award Recipient, 1991

A community-based model of tourism development – premised on current participatory theories – is examined as a culturally appropriate process of economic development in an Inuit community. This analysis intersects issues of research methodology and practice. This paper concludes by raising several policy-related and academic implications of doing development and research in the north.

Cet article analyse un modèle communautaire de développement touristique dans une communauté inuit, basé sur des théories participatoires et considéré comme un processus approprié de développement économique. Cette analyse soulève des questions de méthodologie et de pratique anthropologiques. En conclusion, l'article met de l'avant plusieurs implications de la recherche dans le Grand Nord, liées à l'application de politiques et à la recherche académique.

Preface

This paper honours the memory of Professor Richard F. Salisbury, whose interest in economic development in Cree communities in northern Quebec has contributed to the study of development in the Canadian North generally. His teaching and direction helped to give rise to what is now a second generation of students conducting applied and academic research in northern aboriginal regions. The Richard F. Salisbury Award, first granted by CASCA in 1991, encourages the continuation of such research. My field research in Pangnirtung, Northwest Territories was, in part, supported by this Award.[1]

Introduction

In the 1970s national and regional native organizations in the Northwest Territories demanded greater local involvement in planning and implementing economic development programs. They were responding to the boom of oil and gas exploration and development that was oriented to southern-based interests, but proved to have only short-term benefits for native northerners. At the same time, the seal protest was successful in severely curtailing a source

of cash income relied upon by Inuit in isolated Arctic settlements. Consequently, Federal and Territorial governments sought new resources to develop in the hope of creating long-term benefits for Inuit communities. In the Eastern Arctic, the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) identified tourism as one of these resources.

In 1980, the Department of Economic Development and Tourism (ED&T), together with the Baffin Regional Council, embarked on a 'community-based' strategy of tourism development. In part, this long-term plan was a response to the piecemeal tourism projects that had been developed in a haphazard fashion in Baffin communities during the 1970s. ED&T decided to test their model in a single community. After consultation with local representatives and the subsequent formation of a local Tourism Committee, a tourism pilot-project was initiated in Pangnirtung, gateway to the Auyuittuq National Park Reserve.

The Baffin Island community of Pangnirtung lies 40 kilometres south of the Arctic Circle, situated along the shores of a fiord and framed by scenic mountains. The community attained Hamlet status in 1972 and now has a population of approximately 1,200 people, 95% of whom are Inuit. The majority of Inuit households continue to be involved in the land-based economy, as well as the wage and welfare economies. The Hamlet has a well-developed infrastructure compared to other Baffin communities. Tourism has been a major impetus in the construction of new buildings, in the renovation of older structures, and in the extension of the airport runway.

One goal of the community-based pilot-project was to direct tourism development in a way more appropriate to the cultural and geographical distinctiveness of the community. Another goal was to distribute the benefits of tourism among local people. These objectives were to be accomplished by involving people at the local level in all stages of tourism development. As well, training programs would help build local people's capacity to participate in, and ultimately to control, the industry. This marked a significant shift in Territorial development policy and in decision-making at the community level: the people of Pangnirtung were presented with the **option** of development and with the opportunity to **participate** in all stages of tourism planning and implementation.

During the summer of 1989, I visited Pangnirtung to observe what appeared to be an alternative model of development and to gain a sense of local views on tourism. In the fall of 1990, I returned to discuss the possibility of longer-term research. It was during this second visit that I suggested the timeliness of an evaluation of the pilot-project then in its tenth year of implementation.[2]

To my mind, a participatory research methodology was necessary to an evaluation project that needed to incorporate the objectives of several participant interest groups, and at the same time fulfil my own academic Ph D. requirements (Reimer 1992). The ideals of the participatory paradigm were congruent with the increasing demand by Inuit organizations for a more **cooperative** approach to research (*cf.* Lange 1987). Similar to their view of the history of economic development, Inuit groups consider research as part of a colonial enterprise organized around the needs of the South, with little relevance to the pressing needs of the North.

With these ideas in mind, I proposed that formal local participation, via a full-time Inuk co-researcher, was both complementary and vital to the evaluation of a community-based development program. The GNWT Department of Economic Development and Tourism agreed, and sponsored the wages of a full-time local co-researcher: Andrew Dialla was hired shortly after my arrival in July 1991.

Our data collection was organized around two goals. The **academic** objective was to situate the Pangnirtung experience in the broader issues of Northern research and development. This forms the basis of what I call my 'applied dissertation' in anthropology. The **applied** research objective was to provide the Territorial and local governments with a comprehensive evaluation of tourism development in Pangnirtung since 1980. Andrew and I released our public report in April 1992.[3]

I turn now to a brief overview of how Canadian northern policy fits into the international move toward participatory theories of development.

Participatory Development: Theory and Practice

The idea of a successful relationship between popular participation and economic development originates in a history of failed top-down foreign aid projects in developing countries. In the 1970s and

1980s, international development perspectives focused on ideas of a participatory, decentralized "basic needs" approach (Bennett 1988:12-13; Cohen & Uphoff 1980:216; Hoben 1982:357). In the Northwest Territories, the government's decision to promote a community-based tourism initiative on Baffin Island was consistent with contemporary development events on the international scene.

Social scientists also began to consider theories of participative development that focus on local-level autonomy and community-based strategies (Bennett 1988). A community-based theory rests on a concept of development that defines economic growth within a social and cultural context, to create the potential for increased political power and widened economic options for the future (*cf.* Altman 1989:460). Within this context, anthropologists have drawn attention to "cultural factors" in development situations, and have concluded that local indigenous values, wants and "felt needs" are often different than those of development planners and donors (Cochrane 1979; Van Willigen 1986).

In the remainder of this paper, I concentrate upon such cultural factors in Inuit society as manifested in Pangnirtung. In an attempt to measure the appropriateness of the community-based concept of development, I discuss three questions: 1) how is the concept of economy defined by local Inuit?; 2) does development support the subsistence economy and its attendant cultural values?, and; 3) how does development build human resources to prepare Inuit youth to direct the future of their community?

Community-Based Tourism Development: A Culturally Appropriate Concept?

Native people have maintained a strong commitment to community, not only as the source of their identity, but also an the "only viable context within which the more inclusive 'human development,' as distinct from the narrow concept of 'economic development,' can take place" (Lockhart & McCaskill 1986:163; *cf.* Nuttal 1992). For Inuit communities today, this means re-defining the concept of 'economy,' in a way that bridges the apparent contradiction between subsistence — 'living off the land' — and institutionalized economic structures (Wenzel 1991:98).

The answer to my first question, therefore, requires a *praxis* approach in which people's subjective experience of economic development supports our objective understanding of development, and our theories of community participation in development. That is, we, as academics, must consider indigenous definitions of economy as a social, as well as a material, concept (Nuttal 1992; Wenzel 1991; *cf.* Berger 1985; Butz, *et al.* 1991). The firm association between Inuit social relations and economy has been well established in early ethnographies (Boas 1888; Damas 1963) and has been re-affirmed in the most current ethnographic literature of the Canadian Eastern Arctic (Wenzel 1991) and of Greenland (Nuttal 1992).

In conversations with Inuit, it was made clear to me that the extended family — *ilagiit* — was the basic economic unit. One young man pointed out that, in southern terms, Pangnirtung is below the poverty line, "yet no one is starving and no one is homeless. It is this that cannot be measured. This is the economic foundation of Inuit life" (personal communication, August 10, 1991). He defined economic success, ideally, as one's ability to support and maintain their family.

My interviews with women demonstrated that Inuit do not distinguish between what is social and what is economic according to strict academic categories. My thoughts on this matter were further crystallized by the 1991 Northwest Territories elections. A televised interview with a woman from the Western Arctic drew attention to the blurred distinction and intimate link between social and economic aspects of Inuit life (CBC North: October 15, 1991). The major political issue for women, she stated, was twofold: family violence and economic development. A healthy family, in social terms, was essential to create a healthy community in economic terms.

On the other hand, Andrew — the Inuk co-researcher — interpreted the word economy as a southern 'white' [*Qallunaat*] concept strictly defined in cash terms. Because cash is required for hunting, he categorized subsistence activities as an expense ("a luxury") and not a resource. From Andrew's point of view, hunting was an "Inuit way of life" that now required an "economy" to support it.

This brings me to my second question: if an aim of culturally-appropriate development is to increase economic options, then in an Inuit community, this means the continued operation of a mixed economy (*cf.* Robitaille & Choinière 1985:41; Weick 1988; Duffy 1988).

While community-based economic development is primarily concerned with improving the cash economy, it ideally does so in full cognizance of the importance of the subsistence economy and works toward strengthening the relationship between the two. Salisbury emphasizes this point in his discussion of modern Cree hunting (1986:84). Compared to unemployment or welfare, hunting is not only cheaper, but enables people to remain productive and to do something that gives them a sense of achievement and personal worth. He also argues that a service economy alone is not enough to support a successful regional society. Consistent with his earlier work in New Guinea, Salisbury concludes that a viable local subsistence economy is important to the Cree society (*ibid*:149).

Appropriate development requires economic policies and programmes that do not threaten sources of cash, alternative to those available in the formal wage and income economy. It is significant that community-based tourism development in Pangnirtung has developed in a way that recognizes and accepts the high level of part-time, domestic, or 'underground' economic activity associated with the tourist trade.[4] Tourism provides another income option that for many Inuit is but one of a variety of cash sources. From a southern business and formal economic point of view, however, an 'on-again-off-again' work behaviour is frequently interpreted as a sign of low-level commitment on the part of local people to make tourism a thriving industry. On the other hand, considering the historical 'boom and bust' nature of northern economic development, long-term commitment may not be an effective strategy for most Inuit (*cf.* Pauktuutit 1990:18).

In part, the significance of the non-formal tourism economy is a by-product of the gradual pace of tourism development in the community, which has allowed the growth of local forms of tourism income activity (*cf.* Nuttal 1992). Inuit individuals in Pangnirtung have had the time and opportunity to play an active role in not only **adapting to** tourism, but in also **influencing the transformation** of the industry to meet local needs and values.

In Pangnirtung, cash continues to be circulated in ways that directly, or indirectly, support the hunting economy. Many women who hold full-time wage employment provide the cash resources necessary to allow husbands, sons, brothers and fathers to provide meat resources for the immediate and extended family (*ilagiit*). My interviews with women revealed a continuation of the traditional Inuit cultural division of labour, a gender pattern that places the Inuk woman at the centre of settlement life and the Inuk man at the centre of life on the land (*cf.* Pauktuutit 1990:12; Nuttal 1992:140). Women described this as a cooperative, complementary arrangement, particularly since the collapse of the seal-fur industry. One woman told me that "the fact" of Inuit life today is that "now women have to be working in order for the man to go out [hunting]" (p.c. August 29, 1991).

At the same time, Inuit men choose the extent to which they involve themselves in seasonal activities such as commercial fishing in the winter, or tourism in the summer. This type of income activity allows part- or full-time hunters to earn the cash and to reserve the time they need to pursue subsistence activities. It is in these ways that "cash and subsistence are not juxtaposed but co-exist" (Nuttal 1992:173; *cf.* Berger 1985:58).

However, this co-existence has created cultural conflicts, evident in Pangnirtung by peoples' struggle over whether or not to act competitively. For example, younger outfitters who were prepared to compete as individual entrepreneurs were well aware of senior outfitters' endeavours to strengthen the cooperative efforts of the Association. To date, local outfitters have followed a roster system, in which individuals take turns transporting tourists, according to a list kept at the Visitor Centre. The forcefulness of the general attitude of cooperation was evident in some outfitters' attempts to outwardly abide by the Association's decision to 'share' clients on the roster system, while secretly they 'stole' tourists when it was not their turn. This practice was severely denounced by the Association, as behaviour unfitting to 'the Inuit way' and to the good of the community and the local tourism industry. However, it appears that the Association prefers not to enforce any type of regulation in this regard, but rather to label the wrong-doer as someone who is violating Inuit cultural values.

I interpret this type of tension as rooted in cultural values in constant negotiation between that which is modern and that which is traditional. Traditionally, cooperation was essential among camp members for the survival of the group. Competition was considered inappropriate behaviour as it could cause tensions within the group (Pauktuutit 1990:15).

In answer to my final question, culturally-appropriate development must recognize that commu-

nities are not homogenous entities that will respond cooperatively or participate fully in economic development projects (*cf.* Pigozzi 1982; Chaiken *et al.* 1990). One example of heterogeneous responses to tourism development in Pangnirtung is manifested in generally apathetic attitudes among local youth. Our evaluation demonstrates a tendency among high-school students to be less willing than their parents and elders to welcome rich white tourists with open arms. Part of the problem is a growing resentment and apathy nurtured by an education system that has, to date, failed to prepare Inuit young people to live in two worlds. Based on a southern education model imported from Alberta, Inuit students in the Eastern Arctic are not adequately prepared to make a choice between the modern industrial lifestyle, the traditional Inuit way or a balance between the two (Dickerson 1992). Taught to strive for a career-oriented lifestyle, based on formal education, most Inuit graduates discover that their lessons are not grounded in an economic system that can support such aspirations.

In the meantime, Inuit graduates must either leave their home community, or the North, to pursue career interests; or, they can stay within the community and forfeit these goals. Our tourism evaluation indicates that young people found it extremely difficult to live and to study in the South. As I mentioned earlier, Native people maintain a strong commitment to community. A cultural "sense of locality" influences Inuit youth, most of whom continue to identify with their kin network in the community, and with the land that surrounds it (Nuttal 1992:180). Consequently, most Inuit youth choose to seek a future place in their home economy. This is apparent despite the many comments made to me by teenagers, who expressed a desire to leave what they considered a "boring" place, a hamlet with limited facilities and high unemployment rates (*cf.* Pauktuutit 1990:14).

Salisbury notes a similar tendency among the Cree of James Bay, most of whom were reluctant to work away from their home villages (1986:88). Hence, Salisbury advocates local control over village employment to ensure jobs for native people and to provide a more culturally appropriate style of operation and management, one that complements and integrates part-time subsistence activities. To a similar end, Inuit organizations aim to develop local expertise in the economic sphere, in order to help native people keep pace with the rapidly changing economic conditions in their land (Ittinuar 1981:295).

On this note, I will very briefly discuss some policy implications of community participation for local-level control and Nunavut self-government.

Conclusions: Policy Implications and A Message to Academics

Probably at the forefront of local Inuit minds is the question of how a community-based model of tourism development contributes to the goal of economic self-sufficiency as the basis of self-government (*cf.* Cassidy 1991). Our evaluation of the pilot-project in Pangnirtung concludes that tourism's main form of economic benefit has come in the community's power to create its own unique mix of formal and non-formal cash-related activities that can best meet the needs of local families and the community as a whole. Tourism has so far been a supplement, and a complement, to the mixed economy, and as such has served to increase economic options for local residents.

Arguments for community-based approaches emphasize long-term, small-scale development, which ideally focus on strengthening local control over the economic future of Arctic communities (*eg.*, Dickerson 1992:149). However, GNWT has maintained that 'community-based' implies local involvement and not local control. Because it is the public purse that fits the bill for development projects, Economic Development and Tourism has been able to insist that development plans forge ahead, even when levels of participation by local Inuit are low. In the department's view, to do otherwise would be to violate their mandate to promote economic growth in Arctic communities. At the same time, however, Inuit organizations and academics have pressured for a devolution of powers where the 'development engine' is community driven (Dickerson 1992). This implies that it is the **mandate** that must be devolved, as well as the political and budgetary means to take responsibility for that mandate.

In the Nunavut region, the call for devolution is supported by cultural evidence that speaks for the strong sense of locality and family that ties all generations of Inuit to their home communities and to their land (Wenzel 1991; Nuttal 1992). Development policy-makers — Native or non-Native — must recognize the Inuit sense of locality as an important cultural factor that speaks for the promotion of community-based economic strategies. Hence, appropriate development policies must address the general

issue of building human resource capacities, especially among Inuit young people. This means long-term and consistent training, and apprenticeship programs that are accessible to Inuit in their home region.

The recently ratified Nunavut Land Claim, calls for an implementation training study to establish programs that will help Inuit take advantage of the economic opportunities offered in the Final Agreement. However, the training programs proposed in the Agreement concentrate primarily on the service and formal business sectors of the economy, and do not, in my view, adequately address the non-formal and subsistence economies that currently exist in small Arctic communities. Consequently, the Agreement may in fact perpetuate the 'betwixt-and-between' situation in which Inuit youth find themselves. If the Agreement fails to support a viable mixed economy, Nunavut leaders will find themselves party to planning economic development that has been described as a form of "slow cultural genocide" for hunting communities (Nuttal 1992:180; *cf.* Dacks 1981).

Alongside these policy implications, this case study from Pangnirtung holds a message for academics as well, and I conclude by making a brief statement in this regard. Some applied anthropologists, myself included, claim that development cannot **only** be studied from an objective distance (Sansom 1985; Edwards 1989). Rather, development research is a dialectic process that should include the subjective participation of local people in our objective construction of theories of how development works in their world. This means that, "a proper understanding of the problems of development requires a measure of **involvement** in the process of development itself" (Edwards 1989:125, my emphasis). I view Richard Salisbury to have been an early proponent of this position. His concern for the usefulness of anthropological knowledge, and his applied research emphasis, led to an involved advocacy on behalf of the James Bay Cree.

Given the politics of self-determination in Third and Fourth World communities, we as students of anthropology need to learn that we can no longer be "intellectual tourists" who just grab data and run (Crick 1985:71). The educational institutions in which we receive our training are part of a social system that has created a "scientific colonialism" (*ibid.*:80). If we are not to perpetuate this legacy, then the challenge is to teach culturally appropriate methodologies and research techniques that are grounded in *praxis*, in a continued effort to adjust our graduate programmes to the political and economic realities of the modern field of study.

Notes

1. As a way of keeping track of how the Salisbury Award was put to use, I earmarked the funds for a special study of women's perspectives of community development issues. The Award provided funds to hire a female Inuktitut interpreter and to "thank with cash" those women who offered their knowledge. While my article does not concentrate solely upon women and their development concerns, the reader will recognize their contribution to the study.
2. The fact that tourism development in Pangnirtung was still considered a "pilot-project" after ten years was a matter of contention. ED&T officials viewed the progress of the pilot-project to be on a slow "continuum." Continued government financial and administrative assistance was required in order to maintain Pangnirtung as a model destination in the Eastern Arctic. Among some community representatives, however, questions were raised about when would the pilot-project "end," and when control of the industry would be given to local hands.
3. The public report is titled: *Community Based Tourism Development in Pangnirtung, NWT: Looking Back and Looking Ahead*, by Gwen Reimer and Andrew Dialla. Copies available from Department of Economic Development and Tourism, Government of the Northwest Territories, Iqaluit, NWT, X0A 0R0.
4. The domestic economy refers to income activities that are outside the formal wage economy. The term 'underground' economy has, at times, been used to describe these domestic activities because the income earned in not declared for taxation purposes.

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