

**Call for Proposals:
Grant writing as adaptation in the Canadian Arctic**

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Abstract

In the Canadian Arctic, federal and territorial bureaucratic governance institutions play a significant role in structuring the way that funding for climate change research and adaptation is channeled to the community level. Local institutions and their employees, meanwhile, serve as translators between community goals and priorities and those imposed through the practices of post-land claims governance. The bureaucratic skills required for these acts of translation, such as grant and report writing, are not widely considered part of “adaptation” to climate change, yet they are essential to drawing climate research and adaptation resources to the local level.

By examining adaptation in the context of bureaucracy and institutional activity, this paper challenges representations of climate change that frame local engagement and agency as centered solely in land-based skills and practices. I suggest that local climate change adaptation is shaped significantly by the everyday, pedestrian activities of state and regional governance, but that local actors demonstrate significant skill at reworking externally-imposed frameworks so that adaptation funding can support local priorities.

Introduction

Adaptation to climate change is widely considered to be a process that results from actions taken at the community level in response to biophysical changes in the environment (Piele 1998; Smit et al. 2000). In the Canadian Arctic context, considerable academic work has been devoted to documenting local observations of changes in the tundra and sea ice (Riedlinger 2001; Krupnik 2002; Fox 2004; Nichols et al. 2004), and to examining vulnerability to these changes at the community scale (Ford et al. 2006, Laidler et al. 2009; Ford 2009; Pearce et al.

2010). At the same time, the idea of adaptation is not a self-evidently *local* concept. Adaptation policies are often determined by people and policies far removed from local-scale observations and vulnerabilities. The term, itself, has origins in the natural and social sciences and has been used most often in global and national debates and discussions about environmental change (Orlove 2009).

In contrast to these prevailing views, in this paper, I argue that climate adaptation is imagined, produced, and materialized through a dispersed, multi-scalar network of actors and institutions. Drawing on doctoral research on climate change knowledge networks in the Canadian Arctic, I examine climate adaptation through the lens of grant and report writing, focusing in particular on a call for proposals from Health Canada's Climate Change and Health Adaptation initiative and a women's retreat that was funded through this program. I follow Annelise Riles (2000) in turning the network "inside out" to think carefully about the kinds of communication practices and technologies that link particular communities with the government agencies charged with assessing climate change threats and facilitating responses. I argue that grant and research proposals and reports are technologies that actors use to translate and mediate between different visions and understandings of change.

My focus on grant writing draws on recent scholarship on the impacts of neoliberalism on non-governmental institutions (Stern and Hall 2010). In North America, one of the hallmarks of neoliberal reform in the social sector has been divestment from welfare and directed assistance to local governments and organizations. Government reforms over the past decades have eliminated core or block funding for nonprofits, shifting instead to a project funding model in which non-profit staff must juggle grant applications and reporting requirements from multiple sources, making it much harder for these organizations to meet their overhead expenses (Harney 2011; Baines 2010; Stern and Hall 2010). In this environment, grant writing has become the primary mechanism that local institutions use to secure the funds needed keep their doors open, lights and heat on, and staff paid, a phenomenon that Pamela Stern and Peter Hall refer to as "the proposal economy" (2010).

These trends have been accompanied by a concomitant emphasis on "participatory" and "community-based" practices of research and governance (Mowbray 2005; Craig 2007; de

Leeuw et al. 2012). So at the same time that local institutions struggle to meet the proliferating demands for paperwork as they report on current grants and seek new ones, funders, researchers, and government agencies solicit local engagement and input through a wide range of consultation practices. Often, local institutions serve as the facilitators and go-betweens for these consultation activities, helping visiting researchers identify participants for focus groups and interviews. In this way, these institutions serve as translators between local residents and outsiders; in the language of networks, they are “nodes” that connect dispersed actors and the places where networks are “performed” (Mathews 2009). Similarly, David Mosse and David Lewis have referred to the role of “brokerage” in international development, which they suggest involves mediating or translating between “different rationalities, interests, and meanings, so as to produce order, legitimacy, and ‘success’ and to maintain funding flows” (2006:16).

The proposal economy is evident in the climate change adaptation initiatives of the Canadian government, particularly those aimed at engaging First Nations and Inuit communities. Funding for climate adaptation, channeled through three federal agencies, Natural Resources Canada, Health Canada, and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada,¹ has been awarded to specific projects through a series of internal and external grant making processes. These initiatives translate and translocate the idea of “adaptation,” born in international political negotiations (see Orlove 2009), into particular, local contexts through programs and research projects.

Capacity building and adaptation imaginaries

Health Canada’s Climate and Health Adaptation in Inuit and First Nations Communities initiative is one example of these government-sponsored projects. The goal of this program is to “fund community-based participatory research, where the research is led and carried out by community members who develop culturally appropriate and locally-based adaptation strategies to reduce the effects of climate change on their health” (Peace & Myers 2012). The program personnel specifically suggested that this initiative was unique among other Government of Canada climate change programs in its emphasis on community-based

¹ Formerly Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC); the name was officially changed in 2011.

participatory research (ibid), a research framework that has grown in the Arctic context over the past decades, and that is tied to efforts to address historic power imbalances and inequities inherent in the research process (de Leeuw et al. 2012). However, before communities could compete for research funds to conduct their own research, they first had to be able to identify impacts of climate change on physical, cultural, and/or mental health, so that they could articulate this relationship in their funding proposal and in subsequent reports.

To ensure that communities could make these connections, Health Canada held a series of “capacity building” workshops in northern communities in which community participants were taken through different exercises designed to help them see and articulate the relationship between health and climate change. A description of the workshops by Health Canada staff shows the clear progression that was used to encourage community members to properly render health and climate change as mutually intertwined processes, and to connect these to specific local projects:

During the workshops, participants were invited to share their perceptions on what kind of changes they were experiencing and their concerns about these observed changes. It was then jointly determined which of the changes they mentioned were linked to climate effects and in turn how these could affect the health and well-being of affected communities. As participants became more familiar with climate change and health, they were invited to think about what kinds of projects they could undertake to reduce these effects (McClymont Peace and Myers 2012:3).

In his work on political rationality and state power, Nicholas Rose has described translation as a process that “links the general to the particular, links one place to another, shifts a way of thinking from a political centre to a cabinet office, a government department to a multitude of workplaces...” (1999:51). In this example, Health Canada employees were working with community members to translate a series of diverse observations and experiences into a particular understanding: that health and climate change are directly and significantly connected. The capacity building exercise, then, was partly aimed at building a particular imaginative capacity to see connections between diverse phenomena (insect bites, changes in the weather, animal health and disease, sea ice, the ability to cache harvested animals) as relevant to both climate change and human health. Such practices of translation are undertaken

not only by government agencies and departments, but also by non-governmental organizations, NGOs, and community institutions (Trudeau and Veronis 2009). Translation links and connects, with the potential to shift the everyday practices and even patterns of thought of individuals and institutions in far-flung places. This facilitates enough alignment for widely dispersed actors to form a network or to move forward on a particular collaboration.

At the capacity building retreats, once climate change was understood as related to health, community members were then invited to imagine particular projects that emerged from and supported this framing. The next capacity-building task for Health Canada employees was therefore to help participants identify particular projects that could emerge from a “climate change and health” lens, and to then translate these project ideas into funding proposals and budgets. Workshop participants developed mock proposals that included all the elements of bureaucratic grant writing, including:

...a cover page, plain language summary, community background, introduction, project description (background, objectives, rationale, methodology, activities/ outcomes, partners, capacity building, and traditional knowledge), work plan and timelines, budget, project evaluation, communication and/or results, reporting plan, background information on team members, consent forms etc., and letter(s) of support by a mandated authority (McClymont Peace and Myers 2012:3).

Critics of the idea of capacity building in community development have pointed out that it positions communities and community residents as deficient in skills, knowledge, and experience, paving the way for the intervention of outside experts (Craig 2007; Mowbray 2005). Capacity building also reflects government efforts to trim down social spending by placing larger burdens on community organizations and non-profits (Traverso-Yeppez et al. 2012; Mowbray 2005), with the expectation of greater professionalism on the part of local employees of these organizations (Shore and Write 2000; Stern and Hall 2010).

In the context of this climate change and health adaptation program, capacity building enrolled local actors in a particular way of understanding and acting on change by making connections between health and a changing climate. It also involved transmitting bureaucratic skills so that local actors could participate in proposal writing, thus linking localities with wider visions and approaches to addressing environmental change.

Funding a women's retreat on health and climate change

This brief discussion of capacity building suggests a one-way translation of adaptation concepts into local communities through the mediation of government employees and local institutions. But to adopt this perspective would be to ignore other nodes in the communicative network involved in adaptation initiatives and to underestimate the creativity of community actors. They, too, use grants and other project documents to facilitate their own action priorities and support their own ways of responding to and navigating change.

This became visible to me during a visit to Clyde River, Nunavut, in 2009. A community organization called the Ilisaqsivik Society had received funding from Health Canada's Climate Change and Health Adaptation program to conduct an Inuit women's berry-picking retreat, and I went along as a visiting researcher/observer. The goals of the retreat were to support women in enlarging and strengthening their support networks in the context of social and environmental change, and to document women's knowledge and observations of environmental change in an informal way while spending time on the land. Two *qallunaat* (non-Inuit) researchers helped prepare the proposal and worked with community members on the format of the retreat, but Inuit staff members of Ilisaqsivik did most of the retreat planning and facilitation.

During the retreat, twenty-one women from Clyde River and the neighboring community of Qikiqtarjuaq spent five days together harvesting crowberries and the small blueberries that cover the Arctic landscape in late summer. They participated in semi-structured conversations in the morning and evening, discussing questions that the Ilisaqsivik staff and researchers had brainstormed ahead of time. During the rest of the day, they walked the landscape alone or in groups of two or three, plastic buckets in hand, picking berry after berry and sharing informal conversations.

Retreat participants did not volunteer information about climate change or even the broader category of environmental change, and the facilitators and researchers did not force the topic. Instead, the women focused on how the land offered a source of support and well-being when other parts of their lives felt difficult to control. They shared stories about past trips on the land, locations where berries were most plentiful, and the different hardships associated

with life on the land and in the settlement. They talked about their struggles with spouses, their worries and hopes for their children, the pain they felt about addiction and suicide in the community, and the difficulties they had finding money to feed their families, and many other issues. In their approach to being on the tundra together instead of extracting information from the tundra, as a scientist might do, environmental knowledge and social processes were interwoven together.

Reporting requirements and brokerage for local visions of change

After the retreat, Ilisaqsivik submitted a report to Health Canada that summarized the retreat activities and emphasized the holistic vision of change that had emerged from the conversations of the women during the retreat. One of the group conversations on the retreat, for example, had been centered around the question: “What do you think it means to be a good person, or a good woman?” which was intended to prompt people to reflect on Inuit women’s lives in their totality. The report stated:

One might not think that ‘being a good person’ would fit within a climate change centered project, but it is precisely by being a good, healthy person, in a healthy community, that we will be able to deal with any change that comes our way. It was this core belief that created the foundation for the women’s design of the retreat (Ilisaqsivik 2010).

A Health Canada staff member responded to the final report with a request for more specific information linking climate change and health adaptation, asking: “Could you share the data that was collected? What was the role of researchers while out on the land? What are the changes being observed by the women?” and concluding: “There are a lot of details missing, and I cannot approve the final activity report at this time.”

Health Canada and the community members involved in the retreat had two very different conceptions of how “climate change” should be understood and prioritized. While the women focused on change as it emerged from the total environment of family, animals, tundra, sea ice, and settlement, Health Canada staff wanted the project to yield clear connections between “health” on the one hand, and the “environment” on the other. This reflected the fact that this program was, itself, embedded in the federal government hierarchy and was

vulnerable to funding cuts. The staff members were trying to construct an evidentiary chain linking climate and health that could convince bureaucrats across scales of government and, in this way, to keep funding flowing through this program to communities.

How were these different understandings negotiated? Ilisaqsivik prepared a second report, drawing on a survey administered after the retreat was over. The survey's clear emphasis on country food, health, and environmental change met Health Canada's need for "data" that could be reported up the federal chain. While accommodating the funder's request, the revised report also critiqued the assumption, embedded in the framing provided by Health Canada, that "what women wanted to talk about regarding climate change was observations of change." It rearticulated the women's relational conception that engaging with and responding to change "means being a strong woman, having strong families, and joining together as a community" (Ilisaqsivik 2010).

In this example, the report document served as a technology through which Ilisaqsivik was able to mediate between different visions and understandings of change. It enabled Health Canada to stabilize their understanding of health as centrally related to climate change, but it also served as a vehicle of resistance to this framing on the part of community. While the acceptable outcomes of this adaptation project were set by the government agency, Ilisaqsivik was able to work simultaneously within and around these parameters, first to secure funding for a local project, and then to insist on a more holistic vision of change in their final report to the funding agency. This required not translation so much as brokerage, in the way that Moss and Lewis used the term when they referred to mediation between "different rationalities, interests, and meanings, so as to produce order, legitimacy, and 'success' and to maintain funding flows" (2006:16)

Conclusion

Arctic communities must increasingly adapt not only to changes in the tundra and sea ice, but also and perhaps more critically to the bureaucratic and social infrastructures that shape and limit possibilities for action. As the example of the women's retreat demonstrates, climate adaptation is imagined and enacted through networks that link government bureaucracies with

community-level institutions and actors. These networks contain multiple visions and understandings of change, which are navigated through acts of translation and brokerage. Grant proposals and reports are a particularly fruitful space within these networks in which to understand how different visions — of change, of possibility, of desired action or inaction — are performed and sometimes reconciled. From the vantage point of these negotiations, it is possible to see how climate adaptation encompasses not only human responses to biophysical change, but also human engagement within bureaucratic networks.

While I argue that adaptation is networked, not local, I also suggest that these networks are fraught and uneven. As Sally Engle Merry has suggested, “Translation takes place within fields of unequal power... Moreover, translators work within established discursive fields that constrain the repertoire of ideas and practices available to them (Merry 2006:40). Translation is never neutral; not all actors share the same access to resources or the same ability to determine what visions and understandings of change should be privileged over others.

Studies of bureaucratic networks, documents, and translation are a necessary but as yet underdeveloped component of research on climate change in northern territories. A focus on translation within uneven fields of power shows how global conceptions of “climate change” are introduced to local communities through capacity building initiatives. It also demonstrates the role of skillful brokerage on the part of local institutions, which can facilitate funding flows even in the context of divergent perspectives on change.

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