

The Culture of Community-Based Research and a Borderless North

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Introduction

Community-based research is not a new topic to the Northern Research Forum (NRF). It was a specific topic at the 2004 NRF and will be at the 4th NRF Open Meeting in 2006 as well. Agendas at other NRF conferences have included the topic with a presentation by Dr. Aron L. Crowell entitled “New Dynamics of Cultural Research and Representation in Alaska” at the first NRF Open Meeting in Akureyri, Iceland in 2000. The representation of community-based research at the Northern Research Forum open meetings is an indicator of its importance in the circumpolar north. In the nearly twenty years I have been interested in community-based research in and outside of the circumpolar north, it has slowly emerged as a priority in the research community. This has been and continues to be a slow paradigm shift from research-centric to community-centered research programs. The research community has come a long way in this period to begin to foster community-based research agendas but we “still have a long way to go” as the saying goes. Depending on the discipline, researchers are more or less familiar with the basic concept of community-based research, that is, research centered on community needs and managed by communities. I still encounter highly experienced researchers who do not understand community-based research and know even less about community-based research in the circumpolar north. The circumpolar north is unique and community-based research has unique implications for research here.

The culture of research in the circumpolar north includes many diverse cultures, for example, indigenous, rural, urban, academic, non-Native, corporate, and political cultures, often specific to the various countries that comprise the north. It is these cultures (and others—I do not mean to imply that this is an exhaustive list) that collectively make up the culture of research

in the North. Research stems from these cultures and the linkages between them, becoming a culture of its own—a culture that can be described just as any more traditionally discussed culture group. A research group in the continental United States recently invited me to speak about community-based research in Alaska. The conversations that ensued once again reminded me that, although we have much in common, Alaska community-based research is not like that of our more southerly neighbors. Our research culture is different. How are definitions and boundaries placed on the circumpolar north, what are the colonial foundations of research in early exploratory expeditions, what has been the movement toward contemporary local community-based research, how does policy influence research in the north, what are the views of local communities and the research community on research ethics? These are a select few of the many topics revolving around community-based research that I will briefly discuss.

Where is the North?

What, or more aptly where, is the circumpolar north? How one defines the circumpolar north is dependent upon purpose and perspective. Various authors discuss the variety of ways researchers define the boundary of the arctic, often depending upon scientific discipline or subject matter (Holland 1994; Mirsky 1970; Nuttall 2005; Osherenko & Young 1989). The definitions of arbitrary boundaries such as those for the circumpolar north or the arctic are neither static nor uniform and change from place to place. Boundary definitions change over time due to political influences, familiarity with a region and perceptions of, among other things, remoteness (Holland 1994). Another means of defining northerliness comes from Hamelin (as cited by Malcolm) with the use of a “measure of ‘nordicity’” which assigns a degree of northerliness to a place. This measure has been applied to locations in Canada by Bone (Malcolm 2005, p. 302).

For the purpose of discussion in this paper I define the circumpolar north as countries with an interest in or proximity to the Arctic Circle or that are located north of 50 degrees north latitude in the eight circumpolar member states of the Arctic Council: the United States, Canada, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark/Greenland, Iceland, and the Russian Federation (Figure 1). This definition is broad to include organizations that may not be located north of 50 degrees North latitude but conduct research activities there or have an interest in the area. This definition includes the Subarctic with a southerly most boundary of 50 degrees North latitude (Zhirkov 2005) and is referred to as the north, the arctic and the circumpolar north throughout this paper.

An individual's or a community's perspective influences how they may define northerliness. I suggest, for example, that Southeast Alaska community members would include themselves in "the north" relative to other portions of the United States even though the region supports temperate rainforests and lacks permafrost. Northerliness, and its associated boundaries, is relative. For a Floridian, Minnesota may be "the north" and all of Alaska may be considered "the Arctic" from this southerly perspective. This is in contrast with "the north" referred to by Alaskans or others in the circumpolar region. From an Anchorage, Alaska perspective, "the north" may refer to the North Slope Borough but probably would not refer to Minnesota.

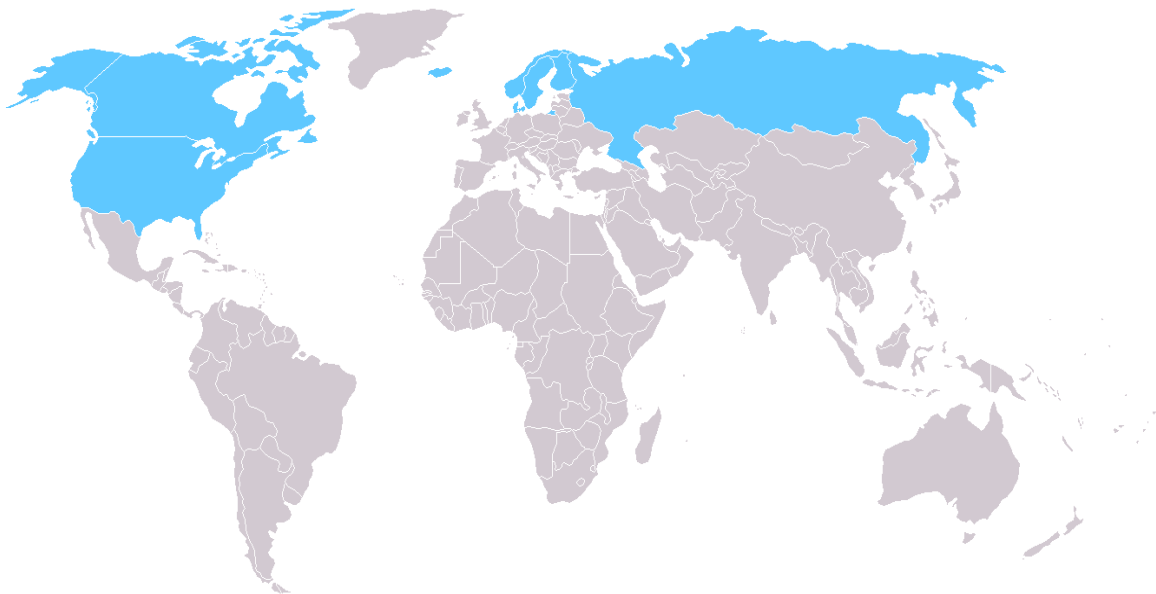


Figure 1: Arctic Council National Members
(Source: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/6/6a/Arctic_Council_Members.png)

Researchers often limit the boundary of the north by definitions of the Arctic that rely on such things as latitude, tree line, or temperature. Definitions may be disciplinary. Geographers, engineers, anthropologists, and epidemiologists may all define the north differently depending on the needs of their research and applicable hypotheses. For example, I was involved in a utility project that did not define Finland's water and sewer systems as northerly because they do not have the complicating issues with permafrost that Alaska and Canada do. Northerliness, in this case, was defined by specific engineering and weather conditions.

How do local communities define the north? Although it is important to explicitly define what one is referring to when using the terms "the north", "the circumpolar north", and "the arctic", it is also critical to step aside from disciplinary norms and narrowness and ask how local community members would answer the question of "where is the north."

What is Research?

So, what is research? Research is a culture, a culture comprised of numerous components and the interrelationships between these components. Research in the circumpolar north, as well as in other areas presumably, is becoming more interdisciplinary in nature. It is important to recognize the diverse disciplinary interest and variety of research occurring. It is beyond the scope of this paper to describe all aspects of research in the circumpolar north for all communities and for all academic disciplines. Communities are often heterogeneous (Berkes 2004). As such, research practices, interests, and concerns vary for local communities—this is also the case for academic communities.

From a local community perspective prior to exploratory voyages in the north, "research" in the circumpolar north may have been the observation of one's surroundings to facilitate survival. Indigenous populations in

the circumpolar have made observations about weather conditions, animal migratory patterns, growing and fruiting seasons, geology, and topography in the north for thousands of years—well before exploratory voyages by non-indigenous peoples “discovered” the lands and people of the north.

Exploration—what has it meant for anthropology and for communities in the circumpolar north? Erickson and Murphy state “no other event in history was as significant for anthropology as the voyages of geographical discovery...” (Erickson & Murphy 2003, p. 30). Holland, for example, presents almost 1,900 entries in his encyclopedia of expeditions and events he identifies as significant in the history of the Arctic. He starts with the Carthaginian expedition by Himilco circa 500 B.C. (1994).

A Movement Toward Community-Based Research

Over the years anthropology has moved from exploratory colonial voyages involved in conquering people and places to cooperation and collaboration with local communities as an important component of research projects (Ferdinand 1997; Gilberg & Gullov 1997). This movement toward community-based research has changed the culture of research in the circumpolar north.

In the first few lines of Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s *Decolonizing Methodologies* she discusses the grounding of ‘research’ in imperialist and colonialist ways and means and aptly points out the power of research for indigenous peoples in that “it is so powerful that indigenous people even write poetry about research” (Tuhiwai Smith 2001, p. 1). “In Honour and Glory” by Aqqaluk Lyngé is an example of a reflection on exploration and research in the north and the ethnocentrism it embodied:

In Honour and Glory

By Aqqaluk Lyngé

“They travelled [sic] and travelled/in a country where they thought/that no human beings could settle and live - They travelled and travelled/and when they arrived they found people/who did not know anything else/about human beings than themselves. – They travelled and travelled/and the hospitality was big/the curiosity without limits/but the guests could not be satisfied. – They travelled and

travelled/and everywhere they came/people were examined/their clothes, sledges, and equipments were brought up. – They travelled and travelled/to a country so big/that there cannot be people enough/to name that many places. – They travelled and travelled/and each island or fjord/headland or mountain was named/in honour of this or that or themselves. – They travelled and travelled/and returned with maps of the country, and the way of life described—to gain honor and glory/medals et cetera/for having travelled in a country where people are settled and living” (as quoted by Kleivan 1997, p. 187).

Whatever is being researched is someone’s. *It* is someone’s culture, someone’s home, someone’s way of knowing, someone’s geography. To think that we, whoever we may be, are researching something unknown is arrogant as is illustrated in Lyngé’s poem. Kleivan states that the message in the poem is clear “you gain honour by returning home and telling about what is new to you but what we are familiar with.” But, the reality is not that simple. Kleivan quoting Hastrup, states “self-evident cultural knowledge is not the same as a genuine anthropological understanding or archeological or other scientific understanding” (Kleivan 1997). Kleivan’s is a superficial and narrow view of what cultural knowledge is. It is also a recent comment. Hastrup’s document was published in 1993 and Kleivan’s in 1997. This is not an illustration of how researchers were viewing traditional ways of knowing 100 years ago. Not all research operates within this *modus operandi* but it is apparent that it still exists. The research community must work together with local communities to value all forms of knowledge and research by working together and learning from one another—researchers from one discipline learning from those of another, researchers learning from community members and community members learning from researchers.

Funding sources such as the National Science Foundation (NSF) now often require community collaboration and the dissemination of research findings to local communities upon completion of a project. The Arctic Research Consortium of the U.S. (ARCUS) states “Arctic researchers have the opportunity and responsibility to work with residents of the region [the Arctic] to conduct collaborative and ethical research projects” (Arctic Social Sciences: Opportunities in Arctic Research, 1999, p. vii). Dr. Aron Crowell, at the first Northern Research Forum in Akureyri, Iceland, discussed various collaborative projects between communities and researchers in Alaska (Crowell 2000).

Country specific circumstances and participation in research activities in the circumpolar north have influenced research collaboration. For example, Denmark was involved in a joint European-North American initiative that resulted in the formation of the International Committee of Archeology in Chukotka—part of the opening up of the former Soviet Union to research projects. Danish research has been described as “the world center of arctic anthropology” (Gilberg & Gullov 1997, p. 12-13).

Discoveries are still being made in the circumpolar north. However, are these research expeditions different from the previous voyages of geographical discovery? Are they providing opportunities for researchers and communities alike? Andreassen notes “information about the Paleo-Eskimo remains was extremely scarce and scanty up till [as recently as] 1993” (1997, p. 23). Do these opportunities come with a price for the people who call the expedition destination home? Bahnson notes “the world’s most numerous and most varied collection of Inuit clothing is stored at the Department of Ethnography in the Nation Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen” (Bahnson 1997, p. 47).

Osherenko and Young also discuss the attraction the Arctic has held for many including explorers, missionaries, and scientists, and the little human opposition these people encountered in their endeavors. “Scientists were able to pursue their quest for knowledge in the Arctic unhindered by human barriers or sensitivities regarding the military or industrial applications of the insights they obtained.” As well as the lack of governmental interest in these activities that allowed people to pursue their activities with little to no accountability in the arctic (Osherenko & Young 1989, p. 159).

Contemporary times have changed this and Indigenous peoples in the circumpolar north have organized to control their land, their lifeways, ways of knowing and government. They are leaders who are bringing the rights of indigenous peoples—people whose land the north was before colonization—to the forefront of the world dialogue on international and Arctic affairs (Osherenko & Young 1989).

Social science research in the circumpolar north is becoming more collaborative—with local residents and other scientists. This is a positive and necessary change in the culture of research. The research arena is striving for scientists to partner with local residents rather than work in isolation from them in their communities and on their lands. Alia states “there has been a revolution in research methodology in the past two decades. In place of the old pattern in which researchers descended

on Arctic communities and left with artifacts and information, today’s physical and social scientific research is conducted in close collaboration with Arctic residents and sometimes has considerable impact on Arctic policy and community projects and programs” (2005, p. 1559). Although circumstances are improving, often times forming local partnerships is still a process of ensuring political correctness to facilitate project implementation rather than effective working partnerships with local experts. The report from the symposium on the Northern Dimension-Expanding Circumpolar Cooperation notes participants raised the key point that “the Arctic cannot—and the northern peoples are not willing to—act as an uncontrolled test laboratory to the rest of the world” (Report: Northern Dimensions-Expanding Circumpolar Cooperation 2004, p. 6).

Western science is not a means of discovering universal truth but is bound by its own cultural constraints and ways that function within its self defined meaning of progress (Lavenda & Schultz, 2003). The Arctic Research Consortium of the U.S. (ARCUS) states “all arctic communities” [not circumpolar] belong to one of the eight Arctic Council countries and as a result local communities have to contend with being a part of one of these states—states that for the most part were “formed by colonialist expansion and thus informed by southern conditions and values” (Arctic Social Sciences: Opportunities in Arctic Research, 1999, p. 21). Colonial and southern values have strongly influenced research originating in these countries and practiced in the circumpolar north. Only recently, has there been a minimal acknowledgement of other ways of knowing and lifeways as they pertain to research. Again, this signifies a shift in the culture of research in the circumpolar north.

Research: A Circumpolar Policy Perspective

Regionalization and national interests are components of the research culture in the north. Anthropology has often been identified as serving the political needs of a given governmental interest (Fardon 1990). Nationalization or denationalization of science in general is influenced if not created by individual government and world politics, e.g., World War I, World War II, and the cold war (Crawford, Shinn, & Sorlin 1993). Country specific policy statements for Arctic research further exemplify the influence of government on the subject matter and magnitude, as a result of funding, on research practices in the circumpolar north. These politics affect how regionalism within a discipline is defined and how it comes to exist, as well as, how research institutions

and various approaches to, and traditions in, research are formed (Fardon 1990; Garbarino 1983).

“Unlike the Antarctic, all the northern lands ‘belong’ to sovereign states. This has led each of the eight Arctic rim nations to develop policies regarding its own part of the Arctic with little regard for other parts of the Arctic region. Thus, the Arctic is seldom perceived as a distinct geographical region. Instead, each piece is seen as part of a more southerly nation” (Osherenko & Young 1989, p. 12). Osherenko and Young continue to point out that to travel within the Arctic between countries (e.g., Alaska and Canada) that a traveler has to fly south to Seattle from Alaska before heading north to Canada. “Communication, transportation, and policy all flow along a north/south axes rather than across the northlands...This is symptomatic of the way we think about Arctic areas, as economic and political peripheries controlled by governments located in the temperate regions” (Osherenko & Young 1989, p. 12) rather than as a holistic region. Although Osherenko and Young wrote these comments fifteen years ago, they still apply, for example, to go from Anchorage, Alaska to Yellowknife, Northwest Territories you have to travel first to Seattle and Edmonton.

Local, regional, and national politics, and the environment they create for research, can both advance and hinder research in the circumpolar north. Political agendas for sharing or guarding national information and the openness of countries to collaborate with foreign researchers have influenced research throughout the circumpolar north (Arctic Contributions to Social Science and Public Policy, 1993; Crawford, Shinn, & Sorlin 1993; Fitzhugh 1997; Schweitzer 2001).

Saarnisto notes the United States and Russia “increased their cooperation in Arctic environmental issues within the framework of the Gore-Chernomyrdin commission” and that the NSF “‘Russian-American Initiative on Shelf-Land Environments in the Arctic’ has many points of contact with European projects in northern Eurasia...” (Saarnisto 1998, p. 49-50). The Arctic Research Commission (ARC) notes the increase in the number of “international bilateral and multilateral agreements for Arctic research (now [2003] about 450) signals the rising importance and breadth of both governmental and non-governmental international collaboration” (Report on Goals and Objectives for Arctic Research, 2003 p. 27). There is, however, still a noted need for international cooperation between the U.S. and other Arctic nations (Report: Northern Dimensions-Expanding Circumpolar Cooperation 2004; Sillanpaa 2005).

There is an ongoing need for international collaboration

to share research experiences and expertise to advance social science research throughout the circumpolar north. Issues of circumpolar research interest do not limit themselves to political boundaries, e.g., climate change, migratory activities of plants and animals, and pollution. Peoples of the circumpolar north have shared concerns (e.g., the impact of government policies on cultural survival and heritage). Comparative studies can advance knowledge of the overall circumpolar influence and expressiveness of a particular research question. Social scientists are addressing questions of interest circumpolar wide such as rapid social change. The Arctic Contributions to Social Science and Public Policy notes a circumpolar pool of data and research experiences may better advance the social sciences as a whole throughout the circumpolar north by allowing for larger data sets and comparative analyses facilitating a better understanding among peoples of how human change and adaptation is occurring in various locations throughout the circumpolar north (Arctic Contributions to Social Science and Public Policy, 1993). The research community, however, must implement this research within a community-based research framework where local communities manage and have control over the research being conducted in their communities, have control over the dissemination of research findings, and retain ownership of research data.

Government policies and relations influence funding and research priorities. National agendas specify research priorities. These priorities dictate funding allocations. The funding allocations influence the type of research available for funding. This then influences what community-based research communities conduct. Incongruencies between government needs, that set policy and funding priorities, and local community needs also contribute to a disconnect between government research agendas and community research agendas.

Who’s Research Ethics?

Ethics is an influential component of the culture of research in the north. Researchers and community members, research participants, and local collaborators do not necessarily perceive what is ethical in research as the same. Perception of ethicality is influenced by culture, for example, traditional community culture, academic disciplinary culture, and professional culture. Researchers need to recognize this and embrace ethics as a shared process rather than a stepwise list of tasks of informed consent, research participant protections, and signatures on forms. What does this mean for community-based research? It means, the process of ethics in research is tailored to research participant and

community needs. Communities need to be in control of how research participant consent and protocols are developed and implemented. Researchers must engage the process of ethics from the perspective of what the local community needs are, not from what the research needs are.

Kozaitis, notes that anthropologists are informed by a code of ethics where people come first and they claim that work is conducted in the best interest of the people with whom they work including local collaborators, colleagues and students. She concludes that some execute this with more intent than others (Kozaitis 2000).

ARCUS states research in the Arctic is based on the Principles for the Conduct of Research in the Arctic approved in 1990 and developed by the Social Science Task Force of the U.S. Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee. The principles apply to the conducting, sponsoring and reporting of research. The principles “address the need to promote mutual respect and communication between scientists and northern residents”; state the need for cooperation “at all stages of research planning and implementation in projects that directly affect northern people”; and that this “cooperation will contribute to a better understanding of the potential benefits of Arctic research for northern residents and will contribute to the development of northern science through traditional knowledge and experience” (Arctic Social Sciences: Opportunities in Arctic Research 1999, p. 55)

Organizations such as the Alaska Native Science Commission are facilitating collaboration and positive relationships between researchers and communities (Arctic Social Sciences: Opportunities in Arctic Research 1999). Communities, governmental organizations, Native organizations (local and international) and professional organizations are publishing research codes of conduct and holding researchers to a standard of full community collaboration in projects. Communities are focusing on their own research protocols and guidelines including for example, the Alaska Native Science Commission Code of Research Ethics, Alaska Native Knowledge Network guidelines for Respecting Cultural Knowledge, the Alaska Federation of Natives Guidelines for Research, U.S. Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee and the National Science Foundation Principles for the Conduct of Research in the Arctic, Inuit Circumpolar Conference Draft Principles for an Arctic Policy, and the International Arctic Social Sciences Association Guiding Principles for the Conduct of Research.

The Belmont report’s principals of justice, respect, and beneficence with a focus on the individual are no longer

enough (see The Belmont Report 1979). Research must apply these principals at the community as well as the individual level in community-based research. Justice, respect and beneficence must focus on, and embrace, community needs, beliefs, and values, and maximize the benefits and minimize the risks of research to the community. Researchers must foster trust through mutual respect and honesty where the best interest of the community is always foremost.

Discussion

The various components I have briefly discussed collectively contribute to a culture of research in the north. This culture of research is dependent on the constitution of the individual components that collectively comprise this research culture. Different contributing components will influence the composition of this culture and how it functions. The culture of research in the circumpolar north shares commonalities with the culture of research in other locations, but also has its unique attributes. The people, the land, the community structures, the geography, the climate, the transportation, the policies, and the ethics, are but a few of the components here that result in a research culture unlike that of our more southerly neighbors.

Decision making in the circumpolar north is changing. Decisions are becoming more localized with local input and participation in research planning and implementation, thereby influencing the current culture of research.

“As arctic communities become increasingly accessible through changes in communication, transportation, and political systems, social scientists working in the Arctic can anticipate a new confluence of research opportunities. Social science now must engage in the challenge of developing effective partnerships with Arctic residents, contributing to education programs in and outside arctic communities, and advocating for needed collaborative agreements and investments in logistics” (Arctic Social Sciences: Opportunities in Arctic Research 1999, p. 34)

Within this culture of research, scientists need to genuinely focus community-based research on community needs. Often, research projects superficially focus on community-needs to the degree necessary to gain approval for project implementation. Some researchers still neglect to disseminate research findings to local communities in a culturally appropriate manner and publish and present findings without complete permissions. Researchers neglect to get to know participating communities and participants and spend as little time

as possible in local communities. Some implement research at their convenience, arriving in communities during busy times of subsistence activities, warm weather, and when the insects have gone—not during the times when it is best for the community, perhaps, in the dead of winter. They employ indigenous peoples to secure community approval rather than to build community capacity. Project coordination may focus on approvals at the governmental level rather than collaboration at the local community level.

Local communities, community leaders, local scientists, and research consultants must advance the standing and implementation of community-based research by acting as ambassadors—educating others on the fundamentals of community-based research. There are many entities working in the north that do not have a thorough understanding of the community culture, beliefs, and needs of the region. Increased education will facilitate an increase in the proper implementation of community-based research.

Community-based research takes effort and time. It is the responsibility of scientists conducting research in the north to bridge the gap between national policy mandates, outside research interests and local research needs. The culture of research in the circumpolar north must uphold the various community-based mandates to first and foremost serve local community needs and strive to reduce the borders and barriers between research and local community interests.

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