

THE LANGUAGE OF PLANNING: CONVERSATIONS ON
COMMUNICATION APPROACHES IN INDIGENOUS
COMMUNITY PLANNING.

by

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We accept this project as conforming
to the required standard

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Reading this paper

This paper is one part of Juliet Van Vliet's graduating project for a Masters of Arts in Planning at the School of Community and Regional Planning (SCARP) at the University of British Columbia (UBC), the other part is a bundle of video interviews, which I encourage you to [explore now](#) and as you read. The login is "planningstudent" and the password is "jvscarp". This paper is best read on the computer with the attached Interactive Video Transcript (IVT) viewer open using a web browser like Firefox or Safari. Anywhere you see underlined numbers in parentheses (ie 1.1) it is referring you to a "video page" in the IVT. Put that "video page" number into the IVT to see the referenced segment, or open a "play list" to play several referenced video clips in sequence (copy the string of numbers and paste them into the "play list" and press "enter"). The purpose of the paper is to encourage readers to explore the full video interviews, so if you don't return to the paper for a while, that is the intent.

The intent of this digital research is increased accessibility. If you would like any materials or if you have questions or comments please email julietvanvliet@gmail.com

PROLOGUE¹

Following my teachers, and theoreticians in Indigenous research methodologies (Smith 1999, Kovach 2009, Wilson 2008) and qualitative research methodologies (Kirby 2006, Denzin and Lincoln 2005), I will introduce myself before I present the research.²

Juliet nitisiyikason. Edmonton ohci êkwa Tofino niwîkin anôhc. My great grandparents on my father's side (Fred and Isabelle Bull) settled near Gunn at Lac Ste. Anne after immigrating from England in the mid-1900s. My grandparents and great grandparents (Ganier, Shultz) on my mother's side grew up around Spruce Grove, not far from Lac Ste. Anne, as did my parents, as did I. I went to grade school in Edmonton, and visited my grandmother at Lac Ste. Anne regularly. I finished high school at an international college in Norway where my human rights teacher pointed out I should learn about the "genocide" happening in my own country. I moved to Vancouver to do a B.A. in First Nations Studies and Linguistics, and lived in Coast Salish territory for the next seven years. It is in Vancouver that I started learning nêhiyawêwin (Plains Cree – yes there are a lot of Plains Cree speakers in Vancouver though the nêhiyawêwin language originates from Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Northern BC). This helped me connect with urban Indigenous communities in Vancouver, and partly founded my interest in reading beyond colonial histories and researching intercultural communication approaches.

At a time of treaty making, [the apology](#), and the acknowledgement of Indigenous language crisis in BC (2005-2009), I found the First Nations Studies Program a [relatively](#) safe place to explore the difficult questions more or less untouched in the Canadian zeitgeist around untaught history, racism, inequality, decolonization and reconciliation³. Through coursework in Indigenous research methodologies, I

¹ "Within writing, a prologue structures space for introductions while serving a bridging function for non-Indigenous readers. It is a precursory signal to the careful reader that woven throughout the varied forms of our writing – analytical, reflective, expository – there will be story, for our story is who we are." (Kovach, 2009: 9)

² Kovach talks about "self location" in the research (2009:106) as part of tribal methodologies. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and Kirby et al (2006) hold that an exposure of the researcher's "positionality," as part of their data analysis is crucial. Positionality is a term that refers to a researcher's inherent subjectivity based on his or her academic and personal background as well as his or her relationship to the community involved in the research.

³ I experienced FNSP classes as relatively safe spaces. The link here is to a video project conducted by my peers in FNSP at UBC examining "how the challenges around talking about race work as an educational barrier at the classroom level" (Perreault and Crey 2008). The findings were that "students frequently report

became interested in oral history research (Perks 2006) and was also able to build lasting relationships with colleagues and research partners. This background, and my recent graduate studies in “insurgent theories of planning” (Sandercock 1998), helped me see Indigenous planning processes as primarily communication and relationship building processes (Forester 1989, Sarkissian 2009, Sandercock and Attili 2012). It is through this lens that I conduct this research.

What drew me to SCARP was Dr. Leonie Sandercock’s multimedia storytelling research, bridging communities of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (Sandercock and Attili 2010a). Coming from a background in First Nations Studies and Linguistics – and having worked with film, theatre, and urban Indigenous advocacy organizations – I had experience working in storytelling and advocacy roles. However, as I started to learn about community development dynamics through planning, it seemed that good planners had many roles, tools and approaches and recognized the moments where each was appropriate (3.35). As I was specifically interested in Indigenous Planning, but a few years ahead of an Indigenous Planning specialization, I had to seek out discussions on planners’ roles, tools and approaches in Indigenous community planning processes.

It seemed that the conversations around a planner’s role in different community circumstances was crucial to understanding the approaches being used in Indigenous community contexts, and their effects. But it is near impossible to have a conversation about the subtleties of approach without first knowing a bit about any given community context. Furthermore, understanding the community context is partly about understanding the people and the relationships (institutional, interpersonal) that form the community. I found that those crucial points – relationships and context– were the hardest to present in lesson plans, leaving instruction on the planning process to be the most tangible for students new to planning.

The design of this project to include interactive video interviews was inspired by the start of the Indigenous planning specialization at SCARP. I wanted to make these conversations readily available to new planners coming into the Indigenous planning program, and doing planning in their home communities, so that critical and constructive conversations around the subtleties of approach could occur with reference to commonly understood community contexts. My goals for this project were to have conversations with planners working with Indigenous communities about their roles, their relationships, the community context, the planning approaches used, and their effects.

troubling and sometimes traumatic discussions of cultural issues in class.” And that though they are important topics, “These situations often affect their ability to function in their coursework, and even their ability to return to class” ([Perreault and Crey 2008](#)).

In the presentation of this research I use an [interactive transcript and video viewer](#), a software that FNSP developed, to link this paper to the [full video interviews](#). I have presented the research in this way to ensure that the larger context in which community development is discussed is not lost when I choose a segment to present in this report. Additionally, I wanted to make sure I left something that future students in Indigenous planning could critique and build on. To quote Shawn Wilson “Research is all about unanswered questions, but it also reveals our unquestioned answers” (Wilson 2008). I hope that future students can use this research to consider “unquestioned answers” and take tribal research methodologies (Kovach 2009) and Indigenous research methodologies (Smith 1999, Wilson 2008) further than I have here.

I tried to interview an equal number of Indigenous planners working in their own communities and non-Indigenous planners working with Indigenous communities, as well as equal numbers of women and men, though it ended a little lopsided on both accounts. The reason for this is that students in the incoming class are both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, both men and women, and those qualities, along with others, can affect your relationship to a community and your role in a planning process. I tried to contact practitioners with existing relationships to SCARP, so some of these faces will be familiar⁴ and so that it would be possible for students to follow up with these practitioners and consider the longer term effects of different roles, relationships and approaches to planning processes.

As I step into the world of practice, I see a huge need for creativity and discussion around approaches to research, community planning and regional planning within Indigenous territories. I notice that simple conversations on intercultural community development have not happened either between neighbouring communities or within communities. In light of the change and opportunities for decolonizing practices that are being created as Indigenous Nations in BC move from being managed by the Federal Government to being managed independently – better relationships and ultimately better communication is crucial to successful planning practices.

⁴ One of the research participants will be a SCARP student in fall 2012!

Introduction

Community planning in Indigenous communities is “resurgent” (Cook 2008) within the western planning paradigm of British Columbia. Though Indigenous planning has been practiced in Indigenous communities since time immemorial (Jojola 1998, 2008), these long-standing Indigenous planning practices have, in many cases, not been recognized by the neighbours, stakeholders and the levels of government with land interests in those Indigenous territories (Harris 2002, Arnett 1999).

When we talk about “planning” in Indigenous communities, it brings up a number of complexities because Indigenous communities have been subjected to planning rather than allowed to continue the community planning approaches used for generations (Jolola 2011). Driven by the expectations of non-native development and non-native development officers, development approaches were applied across the board. Because of unevenness in community social and resource capacity, the application of across-the-board planning approaches was mixed and uneven across communities (Jojola 2008), while not being responsive to community strengths and challenges. The significance of Indigenous planning as an emerging theory of action (Jojola 2008) or as a “resurgent” action (Cook 2008) is not that it is a new thing (Jojola 1998), but rather that Indigenous community planning is increasingly being recognized at a provincial and national level, and in academic institutions. This research seeks to support the work being done by Indigenous community members, by Indigenous community leaders and by community neighbours towards fully recognized and decolonized Indigenous community planning processes.

Indigenous Planning as a theory has a lot to offer community planning as a field (Jojola 2008, 1998) by the values intrinsic to Indigenous worldview, such as those of land based stewardship, the integration of past, present and future generations into decision making processes, collective approaches to decision making, personal relationships to the natural world, and a perspective of management that Jojola calls “fluid,” or adaptive (Jojola 2008). At a time when there are a growing number of planning projects in Indigenous communities, students of planning often graduate without a solid education in Indigenous history, culture or land administration. Additionally, tension between Canadian municipalities and Indigenous communities around infrastructure and regional development planning frequently affects planners, yet young planners are not being educated about the history or cultural protocols for formal institutional relationship building with Indigenous communities. The presence of research and published perspectives allows discourse streams within planning schools, within Indigenous communities (as long as it is accessible and presented there) and in the planning profession around what successful Indigenous community planning should and could be. This research was conceptualized for students in planning (both in communities and in planning schools) to support planning work being done in Indigenous communities.

The practice of Indigenous community planning has a lot to offer Indigenous

communities. Indigenous community planning approaches seek to decolonize Indigenous land administration and community development to better represent Indigenous Canadians' views of community and resource management. Federal planning in Indigenous territories has historically recognized only European land uses, and because of this, the colonization of previously occupied and managed territories was justified (Harris 2008, Dale 1999). This is the same colonizing project that considered Indigenous peoples to be incapable of managing their territories without the administrative "aid" of an Indian Act and an Indian Agent. Communities and community members have been (at best) subject to management by far-away federal agencies, and (more likely), a bureaucratic agenda to solve "the Indian problem"⁵. The lack of recognition for, and/or integration of, pre-existing Indigenous planning paradigms into Indigenous community development approaches has had serious physical repercussions for BC's Indigenous communities today (Ray and Harper 2008).

A challenge for planners is that we often understand the lasting colonial structures better than the pre-existing Indigenous planning paradigms, worldviews, principles, and approaches. We are often trained in current development approaches, not in culture⁶. It takes both of these, and many other kinds of knowledge and skills to move a plan forward successfully – especially as climate trends increase uncertainty and open opportunities for alternative development approaches. Working together to communicate between worldviews requires specific approaches in communication. This project seeks to explore those communication approaches being employed, and seen as successful, in planning processes with Indigenous communities.

Communication and Planning

Stakeholder participation and local knowledge contributions are fundamental to comprehensive community planning processes (Forester 1999, Healey 1997, Arnstein 1969, Sandercock 2003, Innes and Booher 2010). However, developing a planning process for effective stakeholder and community engagement that suits a given community context is always a challenge. This is a special challenge where there are several different community planning jurisdictions at work, as there often are in Indigenous communities, and where ideas on planning vary between those jurisdictions. Though there is a wealth of knowledge in every community around how best to plan for the future, bringing these ideas forward into administration policies are unique challenges for Indigenous communities. Planning and

⁵ A quote from Duncan Campbell Scott, Head of the Department of Indian Affairs 1913-1932 (Tittley, 1986).

⁶ Planning schools largely focus on the Federal, Provincial and Municipal approaches to planning, leaving the cultural or community context learning to individual initiative. Also, Indigenous community members working as planners within their communities often have to spend much of their time learning and working within and alongside Federal and Provincial approaches.

development services have not, until recently, been local responsibilities, nor has broad community engagement been a priority through these processes (2.6). Based on the exclusion of Indigenous communities from regional development planning processes, until recently, relationships with regional neighbours and development stakeholders are typically underdeveloped or poor.

Many planning scholars have investigated the relationship between story and planning (Forester 1989, Mandelbaum 1991, Eckstein and Throgmorton 2003, Sandercock 2003a, Attili 2007, Sandercock and Attili 2010). This is part of a greater post-modernist move towards non-traditional planning cartographies, an examination of those non-physical, human structures that constitute communities (Scott, 2008). To do this, research and assessment tools for planning must change. And, using what Attili calls “digital ethnography” (2007), Sandercock and Attili use film and multimedia languages for qualitative inquiry (Attili and Sandercock 2007, 2009). This project follows Sandercock and Attili (2010a) in the exploration of communication and storytelling through digital video as a way of informing policy and planning as well as practitioner learning.

My project aims to interview some of the planning practitioners working within Indigenous communities to better understand the communication approaches, tools and techniques being employed in successful Indigenous community planning processes. There are two guiding themes for the interview questions. The first explores the roles and relationships of planners in Indigenous planning processes. The second explores the range of communication approaches being used in Indigenous community planning processes, and asks if there are approaches considered to be more successful than others. The full list of questions can be found in the methodologies section, and you can also hear them by watching the [full video interviews](#). These semi structured interviews aimed to bring out planners’ stories.

Theoretical Grounding

This is a student project, conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the UBC School of Community and Regional Planning Professional Project for graduation with a Masters of Arts in Planning. It is grounded in qualitative research methodologies and shaped by Indigenous research methodologies. This section discusses the theory behind the methodologies employed.

Conversations on Indigenous research methodologies conducted through academic research projects bring up complexities around defining anything as ‘Indigenous’ – as opposed to defining something in the cultural context of a tribal tradition (Kovach 2009) such as Nu-cha-nulth or Plains Cree. And it brings up complexities around doing this research in academic institutions rather than within communities themselves - “bringing cultural epistemologies into spaces not fully decolonized”

(Kathy Absolon in Kovach 2009: 149). The following sections offer a description of the research background and theoretical influences.

Academic Research

The academic tradition is rooted in Eurocentric discourse. Academic research also has a strained history with some Indigenous communities and individuals who have not seen benefits of the research. So why conduct Indigenous research through an academic institution? Many Indigenous researchers have decided to work through educational institutions to change them. Kirby identifies that “the question of who produces knowledge and uses knowledge is central to understanding how power is created, taken, or maintained” (Kirby et al., 2006: 1). Many Indigenous researchers see education systems and knowledge production centres as places where Indigenous voices can make a difference for Indigenous communities (Kovach 2009, Smith 1999). Linda Tuhiwai Smith explains that colonizing theories can be re-framed to better describe and engage Indigenous communities (Smith 1999:38). This project seeks to bring Indigenous community perspectives into knowledge production centres to influence planning theory and practice.

Indigenous Experience

Because defining Indigenous peoples (by blood quantum, by the race of one’s father) has been a colonizing activity in Canada since the Indian Act of 1876, discussions around “what is Indigenous?” are significant to and frequent in any work with Indigenous communities (Lawrence 2004). A gendered and state-defined meaning of ‘Indian’ persists in Canadian law, creates jurisdictional disputes and has had physical effects on people with Indigenous heritage and their dependents in relation to healthcare, housing and educational opportunities (Baloy 2008). When Indigenous community advocacy pressure forced legal change to this Canadian policy, Bill C-31 then restricted any child of mixed heritage whose mother was Indigenous from gaining status under the law. Today it is the grandchildren that are disenfranchised (Laval and Lavell 2006: 192). This example of a small change over a long period of advocacy clearly identifies the challenges associated with using legal recourse as a means for social change. Garrouette explains that identity must stem from a relationship to a community, a recognition from that community as being part of it and a role, or a certain degree of responsibility to that community, in other words there is a twofold aspect of ‘being’ and ‘doing’ (Garrouette 2003:118) to Indigenous identity. This project does not offer a specific definition of Indigenous, recognizing that a description of an individual’s roles and relationships in a community, as well as their self-identification is what is most important for research in community planning.

It is important to recognize the diversity of backgrounds and communities captured under the term Indigenous, while recognizing that there are some unifying beliefs between communities, justifying the general term. According to Benita Lawrence, there are shared experiences worth discussing as ‘Native experience’, one of which

is a multicultural or blended-histories perspective (2004: 101). Lawrence's purpose for using the concept of 'Native experience' is to unite Native identity to "bring about the possibility of working together for common goals as Indigenous communities" (2004:101). In this project the term 'Indigenous planning' is used for much the same reason, to support the community partnering process that is already ongoing in BC (Comprehensive Community Planning Workshop, 2011) for increased discussion between Indigenous communities on planning approaches. This project aimed to include community planners with diverse background working with Indigenous communities. The idea behind interviewing planners with experience working in Indigenous communities was that it allowed some flexibility for research participants to identify themselves in the interview in whichever way they felt most comfortable.

Qualitative Research and Indigenous Methodologies

This research is situated within the "relational qualitative" (Kovach 2009, Wilson 2008) research traditions whose research design sees the research process as an opportunity to build relationships, and share knowledge through story (Perkes 2006, Archibald 2008). Kovach explains that, "Indigenous methodologies can be situated within the qualitative landscape because they encompass characteristics congruent with other relational qualitative approaches (e.g., feminist methodologies, participatory action research) that in the research design value both process and content. This matters because it provides common ground for Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers to understand each other" (Kovach 2009: 30). I see "relational qualitative" research traditions to be important areas of intersection between qualitative research and Indigenous epistemologies. Both contemporary research traditions place high value on relationship building, reflexivity, stories and community benefits. These shared values suggest that the "emerging concept" of Indigenous community planning and qualitative research traditions have a lot to offer one another.

One way qualitative research shares common ground with Indigenous research is they both "stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is being studied, and the situational constraints that shape the inquiry" (Denzin and Lincoln 2003:13 in Kovach 2009:30). The "reflexivity" of both research methodologies encourage the researcher to expose the relationships that frame the research process. They "demand that researchers be continually aware of their own biases as a means of consistently locating themselves in the research" (Rossman and Rallis in Kovach 2009: 30). Other common ground is the use of story, and unstructured or semi-structured interviews to gain perspective on the context driving the research participant responses. Positioning yourself in research and capturing the responses to qualitative interviews is always a research challenge. For this reason, I see discussions on research/communication technologies (Aberley 1993, Brody 1982, Sandercock 2010b) as a space where

Indigenous theory and research can easily speak to qualitative theory and research within the planning context.

Indigenous Research Methodologies

According to Jojola (2008), Grant (2006), and Kovach (2009) the strong value placed on relationships is embedded in the Indigenous worldview. When UBC Longhouse Elder in Residence Larry Grant spoke about research and education protocols at the UBC Longhouse, he said “it’s all about relationships” (2006). When relationship building is the research focus, it calls for working relationships with participants that precede, and will outlast, the research. Menzies suggests that western notions of credibility focus on methods and Aboriginal epistemologies focus on relationships (Appleford 2006). In her book, *Indigenous Research Methodologies*, Kovach calls doing relational research “within the value miyo-wîcêhtowin, meaning ‘having or possessing good relations’ (Cardinal and Hildebrant, 2000: 14)” (Kovach 2009). The research process should support good ongoing and future relationships with research participants.

In oral tradition, stories can never be decontextualized from the teller. They are active agents within a relational world, pivotal in gaining insight into a phenomenon (Kovach 2009:91). Storytelling is a way of communicating that maintains relational information. It also promotes the internalization of issues in a community context. In oral mediums, live interaction and relationship building is fundamental to the maintenance of meaning (Bogatyrev and Jakobson 1985: 35). Storytellers will choose stories that address the concerns of the audience, and may change aspects of the stories to help make them understood (Appleford 2005: 40). Storytelling is a traditional structure in Indigenous culture, and Manossa asserts that “the sharing of cultural knowledge through storytelling is something that occurred prior to contact and preserves today and continues to shape the realm of Native performance Culture” (Appleford 2005:124). Drew Hayden Taylor explains that “A single story could have metaphorical, philosophical, psychological implications” (Appleford 2005: 61) and that by taking a story out of context, important content may be lost relating to the deeper meanings. By conducting interviews that ask about specific stories in community development, this project hopes to offer an intimate discussion of issues in Indigenous planning from a relational perspective.

Many Indigenous researchers explain the importance of understanding and explaining your relationships, role or “positionality” within community research (Smith 1999, Medicine 2001, Kovach 2009). Beatrice Medicine describes how her community role affected what could be “known” about her people. She notes that “it was only after ten year of marriage and producing a male child that I was included in “womanly” spheres” (2001: 6). Medicine demonstrates how an individual’s role in Indigenous community affects their ability to participate in aspects of Indigenous

culture. Moreover, this illustrates the difficulty that an outsider doing research would have in trying to come to a thorough understanding of community values and cultural practices. This researcher would have only her own knowledge systems to interpret something outside itself. To explain and make clear one's position as a researcher, one's role in a community and the intended audience for the research is to validate the research by exposing its strengths and limitations.

Borrows suggests that understanding a researcher's positionality is as important in historical and legal research as it is in Indigenous research (2001). Borrows (2001) cites leading ethnohistorian, Bruce Trigger: "Historical records can be interpreted only when the cultural values of both the observer and the observed are understood by the historian." The prologue and the acknowledgements offer a description of my role, relationships and positionality in this research following (Kovach 2009).

Research Tools and Epistemologies

The research tools employed should support the "value miyo-wîcêhtowin" (Kovach 2009). Kovach and other Indigenous researchers use unstructured interviews or sharing circles to replace focus groups (Graveline 2000). Research methods are employed to allow space and time for relationships to be built and for themes to arise that will direct research towards foci of interest to community members.

Kovach describes that Indigenous research often engages research participants with existing relationships to the researcher following the "relational qualitative" approach (95: 2009). The interviews conducted for this research were designed to initiate and develop relationships with communities of Indigenous Planners with existing relationships to the researcher and to SCARP. The inclusion of the full interviews was meant to kick start future student-planners' relationships with those planners by offering an introduction to the community contexts and the relationships surrounding the planning processes.

Because stories are being facilitated from research participants in a specific context and being cited in this research context it is important to the integrity of the "qualitative relational" research methodologies that the participants check and approve the transcripts of the stories and the use of those in the research context (Kovach 2009:96). Greater understanding of community contexts is offered through the use and inclusion of the full video interviews in the project. This paper along with the video interviews make up a mixed-methodology research presentation common to Indigenous research methodologies (Kovach 128: 2009, Borrows 2012). Both Borrows and Kovach talk about how they were able to include stories for "interpretive analysis," a methodology common to Indigenous cultural learning practices as well as the expository writing necessary to satisfy academic standards.

Oral History and Digital Video

A story differs from an explanation in that stories do not involve passive consumption of the values therein. This differentiation between communication approaches is important to the conversation on appropriate communication approaches in an Indigenous planning context because of the widespread understanding in Indigenous communities that “learning has to come from doing, not intellectualizing” (Mander 1991:110). This is the thinking behind including the full video interviews – that encouraging the active consumption of stories will offer the reader an important kind of learning. But do digital stories really preserve that active consumption of a story, or that interaction element? Julie Cruikshank observes that no form of communication is a neutral carrier of knowledge (Cruikshank 1998:49), each media form carries a history and some ground rules for communication. With that understanding, this research seeks digital solutions to challenges around dispersed populations of planning students and Indigenous communities while recognizing that digital interviews cannot replace the face-to-face relationship building.

This interview-based project is shaped by discourse on Oral History research methodologies (Perkes 2006). It is a qualitative approach to data collection that promotes a more personal connection and seeks to offer the audience a greater understanding of community context within the research results. My research findings are presented using the Interactive Transcript viewer (IVT) to encourage students’ exploration of the full interviews. These allow for reflection on both the context and process of the interviews. Kovach offers some support for this approach within Indigenous inquiry traditions, “Analysis for the learner is the task of the learner, not necessarily the researcher.” She continues, “if we choose to write our research findings then we must choose content that honours them” (Kovach 2009: 125). Following other planning scholars that have chosen digital video as a medium to honour the context and complexity of community stories (Sandercock 2009, Hallenbeck 2010b), I encourage you, reader, to explore the [attached interviews](#).

Research Methods

Many community planners talk about the importance of relationship building to the planning process (Forester 1989, Sarkissian 2009, Healey 2010, Jojola 2008, Porter 2006, Sandercock and Attili 2012) and the role of story to community development processes (Sandercock 2003, Sandercock and Attili 2010). This project aims to connect planners with diverse backgrounds and a range of experience levels including students and professional planners using digital stories.

This project focuses exclusively on those planning practitioners who have experience working with/in Indigenous communities. The justification for focusing on planning practitioners working within Indigenous communities is that Comprehensive Community Planning (CCP) within Indigenous communities is a recent phenomenon in B.C., (since 2005) and much can be done to reflect on and

compile successful approaches to communicating community values and incorporating them into the planning process. This project will focus on the communication tools, techniques and approaches for successful planning processes within Indigenous communities.

The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 50 minutes. The research participants had the choice between a video interview, audio interview, or written notes without a recording. The majority of the 10 research participants chose a video interview. The methodologies for collecting primary data were qualitative and interview-based. This research used semi-structured qualitative interviews using five or six guiding questions defined previous to the ethics review board application:

- Who are you, and what do you do?
- How do you see your role as a community planner working with Indigenous communities? How do you interact with the community? Is there a metaphor that describes your role in a process?
- What different communication tools and approaches are employed through your community planning work?
- Can you describe in detail for me one project that best illustrates your use of a communication skillset/toolkit? (If you prefer not to name the community, you can create a fictional name...)
- What tools and approaches in your experience can be described as communication “best practices” in community planning processes with Indigenous Communities?
- Has there been a change in communication tools and practices in the community from when you began working with the community planning team?

Potential research participants were identified as individuals who have an interest in speaking about issues in Indigenous planning, or who have previously been in contact with the researcher regarding issues in community planning within Indigenous communities. A contact letter explaining the project was sent to any such individuals. Through the snowball method, other practitioners were identified, contacted and offered an opportunity to participate with the intent of broadening the base of participation by contacting those with a probable interest in participating. Participants interested in hearing more about the project were given further information. If individuals decided to proceed as participants in the research they were invited to come to UBC campus at a time of their convenience for an interview and were given the options to have an interview in their place of work. Using the snowball method, equal representation of interview participants (Indigenous to non-Indigenous and male to female) were contacted, but slightly uneven research participant representation was attained in the data collection. Even representation was sought because incoming students to the Indigenous planning program will have more or less even representation and this project is intended primarily for their use.

Interview participants were given copies of the record of their participation (the interview video and audio recordings and the interview transcript) to approve for use in the project. The participants were reminded that they were welcome to retract their participation in whole or in part at any time before the final draft was submitted. Each of the participants were also asked over email to identify aspects of the interview they particularly hoped to be included, though none specified specific aspects. Participants were also invited to pre-screen the edited video portion of the project which included their participation and could request modifications or could withdraw their participation from any use before it was released.

The research is presented both as a report, and as a bundle of video interviews. The full interviews are presented in the final project to ensure that the context for the questions and the answers were available to interested audiences. An edited video was produced because it is an accessible format in which to introduce discussions on communication approaches and planning in Indigenous communities. Furthermore the edited video portion is meant to introduce the audience to the research participants and inspire interest in considering more of each of the full interviews [included here](#).

The data processing stage began with the transcription of the video interviews. In that process, some initial themes were identified in the responses to the questions. These initial themes were presented in the form of a video introduction to the interviewees and to the research questions and context. Next, the transcripts were timed to align with the interviews using the [IVT software](#). Further themes from the interviews were identified through the IVT software search function – searching either question by question or searching for specific words and phrases I had flagged in the initial theme identification process. Finally, quotes chosen for the Research Findings and Analysis section of the report were hyperlinked to the full interviews so that readers could choose to watch the interview segment with the research participant and continue listening if they so choose.

Limitations

This research has not been conducted from a tribal perspective, in that it considers community planning experiences across Indigenous communities in BC from an “Indigenous” perspective. This means that the spiritual and cultural aspects of Indigenous community development are missing or may be misrepresented in this research. Garroutte explains that the nature of western discussion “strips Native intellectual traditions of the spiritual and sacred” (Garroutte 2003:103) which is central to Native philosophies. However, bringing those elements into discussions on Indigenous communities requires special involvement from researchers to both “enter tribal philosophies” and “enter tribal relations” (Garroutte 2003:107). This

research has clear limitations in that it does not work from the spiritual and cultural community knowledges on community planning.

Though this research was shaped by Indigenous research theory and methodologies, it has its firmest roots in qualitative theory. This research is not founded in a distinct cultural tradition, does not have a strong relationship-building focus or have strong community involvement in the research process, and does not create great benefits for Indigenous communities (Kovach 2009, Kirby 2006), except perhaps indirectly, or in the longer term, in its role as an educational tool preparing planners to work more knowledgeably with Indigenous communities. This qualitative inquiry, prepared primarily for students, presents limitations around its applicability to practical and day to day Indigenous community planning challenges and learning.

This research project does not include a balance of urban and land based community perspectives. It especially does not involve a comprehensive discussion of the communication approaches used by Indigenous planning practitioners in urban Indigenous communities. Though there are important ties between individuals living in the city and their Indigenous communities (Ramirez, 2007), some of the community building challenges faced by Indigenous communities in cities are different than those faced by land based communities. Today, over half of Indigenous Canadians live in cities (Statistics Canada 2006) and they are concerned about community planning issues that affect them and their home communities. As one of these interviews clearly indicates (10.8) there may be very different roles for Indigenous planners in urban Indigenous communities. Perhaps that is a topic for another or many research projects.

Research Findings and Analysis

This section requires some extra effort on the part of the reader. My research findings are presented using the Interactive Transcript viewer (IVT) to encourage audiences' exploration of the full interviews. If you, reader, have made it this far without viewing a linked video page, this is the part of the paper in which you [check it out](#).

Being a non-Indigenous planning student, I do not offer an authoritative voice on communication approaches in Indigenous planning processes. For this reason I have presented my research findings in an interactive format. Trusting that readers will explore the full interviews, and draw from them their own understandings, I present the full video interviews as an important part of this project's analysis section. Kovach explains, "the process cannot be separated from the product [...] making meaning within Indigenous inquiry demands this much" (2009: 125). I have presented a little about what I found interesting from the interviews in order that the readers of this document will be enticed to listen to each linked segment of the interviews, and continue listening and exploring the theme.

The research participants have a lot to offer, and my analysis may not be the best or only understanding that can be gleaned from these rich interviews. Below are some of my thoughts on the responses to the interview questions. These are meant to kick start your exploration of the full interviews, so don't feel bad if you don't make it back to the paper right away! To see the clips, first open the IVT (using a web browser like FireFox). Explore the interviews on your own using the menu and the chapters list, the transcript search function, or consider the links I present. By clicking on the "play list" button to the left of the IVT you will be able to copy and paste the clip numbers (the underlined numbers ie, 1.1, 3.16) into the play list. When you push "enter" you should get a list of clips to explore that resonate with each of the following themes.

A Planner's Role in the Planning Process

I was challenged by the question of a planner's role in a planning process – apparently for good reason. In response to the question "*How do you see your role as a community planner working with Indigenous communities*" the research participants identified a huge range of roles. No participants identified one specific role for a planner in a planning process, and many identified that it depends on the community context (3.16, 7.14, 7.41, 6.30, 9.8, 9.18), what the community has asked of you (8.9, 3.16), and requires constant adaptation to the process and community responses to that process (3.35). Common responses to this question were that planners often play the role of:

- Bridge (4.9, 10.10, 2.4, 3.50, 8.18)
- translator (7.36, 8.27, 3.49, 4.32)
- relationship builder or connector (4.5, 4.9, 6.46, 7.7, 8.11, 8.54, 9.14, 9.21, 8.9)
- capacity builder (6.32, 6.37, 7.5, 7.9, 10.10, 3.5)
- Capacity validator (3.11)
- leader (4.19, 8.14, 7.5)
- facilitator (3.7, 4.19, 5.8, 6.7, 7.5, 8.2)

The next question looked in greater depth into a planner's role in a community planning process⁷. It asks research participants to *think of a metaphor that describes their role or roles in a planning process*. This was a hard question for most participants, and most participants brought only one metaphor forward in response (in contrast to the role question). Often the metaphor exposed a role that was not mentioned in the first question. They included:

- A tightrope walker (4.31)
- A messenger, a translator, an Actor (7.36)

⁷ This question is modeled after interview questions designed by Aftab Efran for the SCARP facilitation course.

- An Artist (6.18)
- The moving parts of a machine (5.9)
- Taping my mouth shut (8.15)
- The subtleties of different leadership roles (8.14).

Overall, these interviews identified the huge range of roles for planners in a planning process, some of which were only subtly different from one another. Many of the roles were “bridge building,” “translating” or “connecting” roles demonstrating one important aspect of a planner’s role in a process. Many of the interviewees explained that being responsive to the role that is required in different planning processes was an important part of planning successfully.

Communication Approaches

This question was asked in a really broad way, and asked slightly differently in every interview. The question was loosely framed to ask “*What different communication tools and approaches are employed through your community planning work? So, how do you communicate to communities, and how do you get information from communities into the planning process?*” The participant responses shared two common themes: the importance of face to face communication and the importance of responsiveness to community feedback on the part of the planner. The importance of and the reasons for face-to-face meetings were outlined explicitly by the majority of research participants (2.10, 2.32, 6.30, 3.16, 4.10, 4.12, 8.49, 10.16, 9.21, 5.13). The second theme identified by the majority of participants was that the communication approaches should be responsive to the community context, and not be pre-fabricated (2.9, 6.30, 6.38, 3.37, 3.49, 7.16, 7.41, 7.30, 8.47, 8.49, 4.22, 4.32, 5.13, 9.53, 10.62). Most of the interviewees explained that they used a variety of tools ranging from multimedia to meetings but spent the most time talking about the face-to-face, and the relationship building process. The other thing that became clear through the answers to these questions was that cookie-cutter processes were unpopular. Each explained how important it was to listen, and be responsive to the community’s communication needs.

Communication Challenges

Participants were asked to identify “*a time when communication was a challenge in the planning process.*” This question was intended to facilitate stories from when these interviewees were just starting out in planning work, around communication challenges in Indigenous planning processes, and how they dealt with them. This question tries to identify some of the challenges planning students will want to prepare for or have the skills to handle. But it also identifies specific community contexts and gives some background to the roles and relationships of the planner in the community process.

Jeff shared a story about a meeting with Elders that (unbeknownst to him) was planned as a traditional feast (3.21). Jessie Hemphill shared a story about when she was leading a process, and trying to work with some of the tools and toolkits prepared for community planning initiatives. She found that for her community, a less structured approach (led by a strong facilitator) went a lot smoother (4.22). Jess Hallenbeck shared a story about a surprise 4-5 hour conversation with a community leader (9.60), and though it was a challenge, it set up the project partnership very well. Andrew identified the challenges associated with having a population that is spread out (2.31) and how that does affect the communication tools that work. Robyn talked about “engagement burnout” in small communities who have been involved with a lot of approaches that did not resonate with them (5.36). A few participants identified times where there was disappointment over low turnout, late turnout or turnout from only one demographic to meetings they organized (6.52, 9.55). They also mentioned the important learning they gained from these moments. For example Chris became more aware that in his community, as long as people were kept well informed, they really trusted a small group of dedicated community members to work on the plan (6.53). Three participants talked about the challenges of trying to get people to work together between worldviews (8.29, 8.27). Three participants identified “fun” as a specific challenge for planning processes (4.15, 3.47, 8.18, 10.23) that is often not considered, but should be.

Communication Change

The question asking “*whether there has been a change in communication tools and practices throughout the process,*” is trying to get at how communication changes over the course of a project and why. This question most often had participants explain how relationships are built with communities over time. It also opens the floor for a discussion around the end results – the successes or challenges – of planning processes. The participant responses to this question were largely that communication does change throughout a planning process (6.43, 5.41, 3.39, 3.45, 7.45, 8.33, 9.50). And that the process of relationship building (4.34, 7.45, 6.46, 10.24) and finding a common language (8.45, 5.45, 9.23, 7.52, 4.35, 8.54) are important parts of any planning process. Andrew explained that he felt communication approaches changed most when the community policy structure changed (2.18). He explained that once the Nation actually had responsibility and a say in land use planning process, this was the most marked change in how the community communicated. Nathan explained that it is partly the role of the planner to try changing the way that communities are communicating through the planning process (8.58).

Communication Best Practices

In the interviews this question was very loosely framed, and was presented differently for each one of the participants. Generally the question asked about “*the*

tools and approaches that can be described as communication best practices with Indigenous community planning processes". This question did not generate many specific examples from participants, so was not as useful for understanding the context from which each participant was speaking. However most/all participants offered or agreed that there were no "best practices" in communication principles when working with First Nations communities in a planning process. It was all about listening and being responsive (7.24, 7.38, 8.27, 9.20, 9.25, 6.21, 5.18, 3.37, 9.52, 5.37).

Conclusion

This research on communication approaches in Indigenous planning processes seeks to support planning students' exploration of their role in planning processes and how adaptive communication approaches can support successful community planning processes in Indigenous communities in BC. My analysis of the interviews supports the understanding of planning processes as relationship building processes, where ongoing consideration of the community context and the communication approaches employed were fundamental to successfully addressing community objectives. However, the real strength of this research lies in the reader's exploration of the full interviews for their consideration of the themes presented by the interviewees.

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