

Redefining Canadian Aboriginal Culture from Within

Graduating Essay

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Abstract

This essay attempts to use the community capital framework (CCF) to highlight the marginalization of First Nation communities in Canada and explore methods to move towards sustainable development by improving total community capital. The First Nations of Canada were deprived of their community capital in an attempt to extinguish their way of life throughout history. Assimilation was the goal, but the economic, social, cultural and political domination imposed on aboriginal communities had detrimental effects, some of which still exist today. Community forestry is a possible strategy to develop and rebuild these communities and allow aboriginal culture to redefine itself. Taking steps to provide First Nation communities with secure, long term access to environmental resources and a greater degree of autonomy can ultimately result in the preservation of a way of life by allowing these communities to define their future from within.

Keywords: Community capital, decentralization, sustainable development, assimilation, community forestry.

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Introduction

The application and definition of the term “community” is as diverse as are the communities of the world. The Oxford dictionary defines the term as “the people of a district or country considered collectively, especially in the context of social values and responsibilities ” (Oxford 2012). As an organizational unit, a community collectively holds a large pool of interconnected resources. Multiple researchers (Bebbington 1999, Callaghan & Colton 2007, Emery & Flora 2006, Scoones 1998,) have developed a continually evolving framework (“Community Capital Framework” or CCF) to describe and categorize these resources. The total community capital can be broken down into components of human, social, cultural, economic, political, physical, and natural capital. When considering the CCF, one must understand that each form is inextricably related to one another through a complex and dynamic system of exchanges.

When expanding their influence and borders, numerous empires or powerful nations often conquer other smaller cultures by dismantling the relationships between forms or through the outright destruction of community capital. This reduction of cultural diversity and distinct ways of living has ruined countless lives and severely impacted many generations of people. In my opinion the government of Canada has acted in a similar manner by diminishing the total community capital available to First Nations through political power and legislation. Indigenous cultures that once prospered from the exclusive use and stewardship of the land have been displaced, abused and impoverished over time. These conditions should not exist for any community in Canada as it is one of the most bountiful nations in the world. This essay attempts to use the community capital framework to highlight the marginalization of First Nation communities in Canada and explore methods to move towards sustainable development by improving total community capital. First, the community capital concept will be introduced and the concept of community development will be discussed. The second section illustrates how the First Nations of Canada were deprived of their community capital in an attempt to extinguish their way of life. Finally, community forestry is put forth as a possible strategy to develop and rebuild these communities and allow aboriginal culture to redefine itself. In my opinion,

taking steps to provide First Nation communities with secure, long term access to environmental resources and a greater degree of autonomy can ultimately result in the preservation of a way of life by allowing these communities to define their future from within.

Capital Framework

Analyzing community and economic development using the Community Capitals Framework (CCF) allows us to identify stocks or assets of each capital, the types of capital invested as well as the flow, interaction and impacts between capitals (Emery & Flora 2006).

Natural Capital

Natural capital is the basis for all life on earth and therefore all other forms of community capital are derived from this. Natural capital is made up of the water, air and soils which provide us with the means for basic subsistence, as well as building and manufacturing materials. It provides an incredible amount of ecosystem services which were described by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment in 2005. The assessment stated that ecosystems provide various regulating services such as control of local rainfall, removal of pollutants, regulation of disease, protection from natural disasters and climate regulation through carbon storage. Life-supporting ecosystem services include processes like plant growth, generation and preservation of soils and renewal of their fertility. Prugh (1999) describes how exploring the mysteries of nature contributes to our understanding of ourselves “from the varied perspectives of aesthetics, spirituality, heritage, culture, and science.” In this respect, natural capital plays a large role in shaping the cultural capital of a community (Costanza & Daly 1992) and the human capital of the individuals within.

Human and Cultural Capital

Cultural capital is comprised of heritage, ethnicity, practices, languages, beliefs, myths, stories, traditions, and values which are shared socially within and between generations (Throsby 1995). As stated by Emery and Flora in 2006, “cultural capital reflects the way people “know the world” and how they act within it. Cultural capital determines how creativity, innovation, and influence emerge and are

nurtured” (pg21). This is different from human capital which is generally defined as the education, abilities and skills of individuals used to enhance their resources. It contains aspects of physical health, moral character and emotional stability. It also encompasses the ability to access knowledge and increase understanding. Human capital is important throughout the community structure but is crucial for leaders to effectively shape the future of a community. Leaders with strong human capital have a greater ability to create new ideas, come up with solutions for adversity and generate societal impact (Flora et al 2004).

Physical and Economic Capital

The places that contribute to the health and advancement of community capital are referred to as physical capital. Roads, water systems, parks, schools and libraries are all good examples. These structures are often provided by government but occasionally private organizations will donate space or services (Callaghan & Colton 2007). Communities with sufficient capacity may also create physical capital for themselves. To invest in capacity building, a community must have economic capital which is defined as financial resources or wealth. It may be derived from engaging in commercial activities such as the sale of goods and services. Economic capital, if correctly used and invested, can be a powerful tool as it can be used as a substitute for other types of capital (Emery & Flora 2006). For example, hiring skilled contractors to carry out work or buying materials to build infrastructure. It can also be used as a means of deriving other forms of capital; for example, investing in education can improve human capital.

Social and Political Capital

Relationships that have developed around shared values, norms and trust (Western et al 2005) constitute social capital, which requires action to establish and maintain. Activities within a community that help create trust, tolerance and security can help to build social capital. Conversely, situations that promote intolerance, greed, distrust and fear will degrade social relationships (Callaghan & Colton 2007). The networks that comprise social capital allow for groups to support each other, solve problems and in some cases they allow for resource access. Political capital is a reflection of a community's access to power. Political power is related to control over actions related to development, growth and

administration of community resources (Flora et al 2004).

Community Development

By using the Community Capitals Framework we can examine community development in a more comprehensive and holistic manner, which is very important when considering sustainability and resiliency. The concept of sustainable development was defined in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development (also known as the Brundtland Commission) in 1987 as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. I believe that for a process to be truly sustainable, it must be indefinitely repeatable and therefore should be without long term negative effects.

Often, a very narrow focus of measuring societal progress is taken that is centred upon economic growth (ex Gross Domestic Product, Gross National Product, Purchasing Power Parity). Such models only take into account one form of capital and instil a perverted sense of achievement with serious negative consequences for other much more important forms of capital. Unbridled economic growth is “destructive of natural capital and beyond some point will cost us more than it is worth. At this point growth has become anti-economic, impoverishing rather than enriching” (Costanza & Daly 1992 pg 43). The only way to conceive notions of sustainability using such models, is to ignore the multitude of negative externalities.

It is essential to look at processes using an integrated approach such as CCF to fully understand how the stocks of capital are flowing in relation to each another. This way investments and withdrawals of capital can be analyzed as well as their relative efficiencies. These types of frameworks are useful when considering sustainable development rather than simple growth. Development requires innovative, critical thinking to create simultaneous, balanced increases in multiple stocks of capital. Having healthy stocks and flows between capitals will also make communities much more resilient as they have greater flexibility in response to changes and crises (Callaghan & Colton 2007).

Marginalization of First Nations

Since the colonization of Canada began around the 15th century, the First Nations of Canada have been dispossessed of their lands, territories and resources. As a consequence, they have often lost

control over their own way of life and identity. A process of economic, political and cultural domination was employed by the settling European society to gain control over aboriginal people, their territories and the natural resources within them.

Economic Takeover and Loss of Natural Capital

Many First Nation societies in British Columbia were once based upon house groups (or *walps*) that were united through matriarchal relationships (Menziés and Butler 2008). All members of society had a right to the land represented by a house leader, so the local property was essentially held communally. This structure of communal use likely fostered a more holistic view of community capitals that is more akin to the CCF. The depletion of natural capital for gains in another area would likely be recognized by other community members as the destabilization of their way of life. When many different resources and social benefits are being shared between house groups, a much clearer vision of the exchanges between natural and other community capitals can be realized. The distinction between the different types of community capital would be very hard to discern. First Nation cultures held a rich and deep understanding of the relationships between natural processes, animals (which were regarded as conscious beings to form relationships with) and the human society to the point where they became one. This is often referred to as Traditional Ecological Knowledge, an extremely rich source of human, cultural and social capital for aboriginal society (Berkes 2008).

Principles of harvesting based upon maintaining overall community health involve a much more equitable distribution of benefits. The harvests were socially defined, as opposed to the capitalist viewpoints that would follow where ownership, value and demand determine extraction rates. B.C. in particular was not peacefully settled but economically colonized on the basis of this capitalist economy. The mindset of the European settlers was that they were arriving into what they asserted to be an unclaimed and unowned landscape that was theirs to be renamed, reclaimed, and resettled (Harris 1997). In their minds the land was only claimed if it was “removed from a state of nature” through the application of labour. The traditional community practices of agriculture, aquaculture (herring roe) and silviculture (single tree selection and using fire to increase biodiversity) were totally disregarded as a form of labour by the Europeans. This meant the natural capital was open for exploitation as the natives had no claims or rights to the land.

In the first period of colonization, a mercantile economy existed where the First Nations controlled access to the land, resources and workforce. The people were well aware of the correct time and place to harvest and had advanced methods for harvesting resources like the salmon in BC (Menziess and Butler 2007) which made initial resource extraction and exploration possible for the Europeans. They traded copper, tools and guns for furs or worked as wage labourers. This is viewed by most as having a positive effect on the communities as they became more wealthy and enriched as their economies grew. This was indeed beneficial to the new aboriginal economic capital system in place and would have positive effects on most of the other forms of community capital. Guns, steel axes and traps would have made catching game easier, leaving more time for leisure and socializing which are important to maintain community bonds.

Over time their human capital was undercut as their valuable knowledge of the local resources was stolen/usurped. Many traditional methods were perceived to be unproductive or inefficient. Industrial action then began and centralized processing facilities (ex canneries, sawmills) were constructed. Colonial laws and later the legislation of the provincial and federal government were aimed at devaluing the traditional economies of First Nations and limited the types of work available to aboriginal people. In many ways they were discriminated against as “Indians” and assigned their role at the bottom of the hierarchy of wage relations. The discriminatory commercial fishing licensing procedures in B.C. are a prime example. In 1892, only 40 of more than 3,000 Indigenous fishers on the Fraser River had licenses that enabled them to catch and sell fish independently from canneries (Newell 1997). She further explains that by 1912, federal policy was openly discriminatory, giving preference to white fishermen throughout coastal B.C. by banning the issue of seining permits to natives. Additional barriers to entry existed in due to the fact that the majority of fishing vessels were large boats with expensive equipment. Aboriginal fishermen were denied access to loans and financing because legally their reserves were the property of the Crown. Once the production and management of Canadian fisheries had been transferred to the federal government, the aboriginal economies had been crippled by removing one of the main sources of wealth or financial capital (Harris 2008). Lutz (2008) also describes the occurrence of similar processes of removing control in forestry, and the harvesting of game.

By defining First Nations people as “Indians”, the federal government effectively established a set of race based privileges and limitations around available economic opportunities. Banning their

involvement in the political process prevented them from any career in law or politics. *The Indian Act* with its prohibitive measures surrounding alcohol and aboriginal people (minors by law), stated that they could not legally participate in the extremely profitable liquor trade or the hospitality sector (Lutz 2008).

During the early period of colonialism, the natural capital that had supported rich indigenous cultures for thousands of years was removed at extraordinary rates by foreigners and being sold for profit. Menzies and Butler described these practices and their proponents in a 2008 as follows:

Early industrialists, such as Bell Irving (fisheries), Dunsmuir (mining), and MacMillan (forestry), engaged in a form of primitive accumulation as they and their compatriots rolled across the landscape plugging canneries with fish, ripping open the earth, and tearing down trees. (pg 132)

Using a narrow viewpoint of progress as the accumulation of wealth and population, the First Nation communities were branded “lazy Indians” in many cases. Much of their time was “wasted”, meaning they did not spend most of it working at harvesting furs, fish and wood. By this definition, the laziest would be those who would not trade, engage in progress or were otherwise independent. However, if the “wasted” time is considered using a more encompassing framework, such as community capitals, the value of spending quality time maintaining and sharing skills, histories and culture is revealed. Lutz (2008) discusses the importance of social, cultural and human capital in First Nation communities:

Leisure time spent in storytelling, lounging, gambling and visiting was no wasted time. In an economy in which trade was interpersonal, food was shared communally, spiritual and practical knowledge was transmitted through stories and practice. In a culture where the spiritual and economic were not separable, time spent on spirit quests, salmon ceremonies, prayer and appeasing unhappy spirits was vital to the economy. (pg 35)

It is evident that the natural world had a massive influence and its importance ran throughout the economy and culture of the community. It is easy to see that from this point of view, nature and spending time together in natural places is more important than the constant gathering of resources. The reality is that most of what needed to be derived from the natural capital for sustenance and trading could be done at certain times of year. (for example, the end of growing seasons, animal migrations,

salmon runs).

As time proceeded it was clear that it was becoming increasingly difficult for communities to get access to the natural resources and the resulting benefits. Settlers undermined local First Nations control by saying the “crown” owned the land, fish, game, etc and that they would issue permits and licenses for harvest. The invention of aboriginal rights, title and status during the early 20th century proved to be a period of racial discrimination in Canada.

Reservations and Loss of Natural Capital

Assimilation of First Nations into the European settling society was accomplished by first denying their access to natural capital. This could be best achieved by isolating these distinct cultures on small reserves, gradually preparing them for integration with the dominant society while destroying relationships between their culture and natural capital. Through the *Indian Act*, First Nations were denied use of vast expanses of land that they had traditionally managed and inhabited. The Minister of Indian Affairs was granted the power to relocate and allocate small tracts of federal land for the communities to live on. On one hand, federal and provincial native land policy was that non-native settlers were permitted to homestead 320 acres of land, and on the other, native reserves were limited to 20 acres for each head of a family of five persons (Moss et al 1991).

Even on the reserves, the discretion of the Minister was the ultimate authority for all First Nation activities. They were seen as incapable of making rational decisions for their own benefit. Alcohol was absolutely prohibited and simple freedoms such as the ability to leave the reserve could only be granted by the Minister. Reserve lands are not the personal property of a band or a band member and may not be seized legally or taxed. The original intention of this may have been to protect the exclusionary and extractive rights to the reservations but it also makes it very difficult for residents to borrow financial capital to invest in improvement of infrastructure or physical capital.

Some early Canadian politicians and settlers viewed the reserve system as a protective measure until native cultures eventually became extinct. This practice did have the intended effect of massive detrimental impacts on the health of the people, land and culture. However, Moss et al (1991) assert that this isolationist policy has ironically “had the unintended result of preserving Indian cultures and providing a means for the Indian people to resist assimilation pressures.”

Political Domination and Loss of Power

The community capital of many First Nations in Canada was exploited and dismantled to destroy their independent and sovereign culture. In some parts of pre-confederation Canada, immigrants enslaved aboriginal people as “Pawnees” (Tarnopolsky and Pentney 1985). Slavery is the most obvious form of cultural exploitation but was very rare in relation to the more widespread and gradual approaches to assimilation. The main strategies for accomplishing this goal were the residential school system, the removal of traditional governance/centralization of power and the explicit prohibition of cultural activities. Most of this was managed through the creation of discriminatory legislation such as the *Indian Act* (and its amendments/revisions since 1876), and the *Act for the Gradual Civilization and Enfranchisement of Indians* of 1857.

Soon after Canadian confederation (1867) the European political system was forced upon many diverse First Nation communities throughout the country. Their own legitimate political systems were devalued and ignored while the federal government imposed their form of democracy. Tobias (1967) describes that the “Superintendent-General or an agent delegated by him was empowered to call elections, supervise them, call band meetings, preside over and participate in them in every way except by voting and adjourning them” (pg19-20). Aboriginal governments were granted very limited powers, if any, which were subject to confirmation by the federal government. For example, the government continued expanding its political control by removing elected traditional leaders and prohibiting their re-election. They were also excluded from participating in the new political institution that was put in place. At one time or another, all provinces except Newfoundland and Nova Scotia have passed laws that disqualified aboriginal people from voting in any political process. This flagrant racial discrimination was also federally adopted in *The Electoral Franchise Act* of 1885. The strategy was to eliminate the political capital, remove control over resource access and encourage people to give up their native status and assimilate with the larger society. These laws were introduced to bring the native culture to a “civilized” state. It was assumed that they were not living by any laws and were “savages”. In reality their culture was shaped by laws, both the laws of a social society and those of nature. Rich social capital is responsible for a shared vision of how to act and gives rise to *defacto* laws or “unwritten rules” that are often more powerful than judicial punishment.

Prohibition of Culture and Loss of Social Capital

One of the most devastating laws under *The Indian Act* was the prohibition of potlaches and dance ceremonies. Section 3 of *An Act Further to Amend The Indian Act, 1880* :

3. *Every Indian or other person who engages in or assists in celebrating the Indian festival known as the "Potlach" or in the Indian dance known as the "Tamanawas" is guilty of a misdemeanor, and shall be liable to imprisonment.*

As previously stated, these practices were important social, cultural and political meetings that served a wide range of purposes from affirming leadership and social order to the inheritance and transfer of property. To the federal government, banning these practices would accelerate the assimilation process, destroying aboriginal community capital in the process. To deny a community of their traditions has negative effects on cultural, social and human capital to a great extent. Without the opportunity to teach, practice and develop inter-generational practices during ceremonies, the necessary components for building a shared sense of heritage and ontology are lost. Trust, social networks and security that was normally established and maintained at these social gatherings could no longer occur. This also severed the important inter-generational social bonds needed to establish cultural norms, effectively disrupting social capital. This prohibition on *potlachs* in Canada continued until as late as 1951. Under these laws, arrests were made and ceremonial items and symbols of government seized and in many cases never returned (Canada HOC 1983).

Although quite severe with lasting affects, this pales in comparison with the effort to sever social and cultural ties through the assimilation of aboriginal youth at church-run residential schools. These schools were a government sponsored initiative to efficiently replace traditional values and practices with "civilized" or "Christian" ones. Children were removed from their communities and influenced to perceive the teachings and guidance of parents and elders as a fallacy. The sense of social security that comes with being part of a family/community was lost. The health conditions the children were subjected to in the schools were atrocious. Disease and death became a common feature and were ignored by government officials and the public alike. Physical, emotional and sexual abuse remained

constant until the schools were finally abandoned in the 1980s (Milloy & Angel 1999). Every aspect of native culture was driven from the children. The schools attempted to devalue and remove their unique epistemology, cosmology and ontology. They were not even allowed to speak their own languages without severe punishment. The removal of a single generation from traditional practices and teachings has a significant effect on the transfer of many forms of cultural and human capital, however the residential school system was in operation for over a century in an effort to assimilate First Nations. This proved to be an effective method for dismantling their ability to maintain and develop any form of community capital. Through these practices not only were they able to dismantle a culture's past, but simultaneously corrupt their future. "The residential school system was at best a tragic failure and at worst a national crime." (Milloy & Angel 1999).

Moving forward

The First Nations of Canada were not conquered and moving towards improving the health of their communities will involve meaningful reconciliation. The problems faced by their communities are not isolated past events but open wounds. It is a matter of ethics, morality and equality for the government and people of this country. The paternalistic relationship of dependence that has been created by undercutting the capital of aboriginal communities must be rectified. In order to do this land tenure claims must be resolved to allow for secure, long term access to the natural capital that is completely intertwined with development of human, social, physical, economic and cultural capital in aboriginal communities. In addition to resolving land tenure claims, aboriginal rights and title must be recognized and aboriginal governing systems must be re-established to decentralize political power and enrich culturally distinct communities.

First Nations in BC are already taking action to improve their position, socially and politically by refusing to be labelled as another ethnic or immigrant minority group (Delgamuukw 1997, Haida 2004 and Taku 2004). They wish to define themselves as a sovereign entity whose collective rights were not extinguished and should be guaranteed by virtue of their prior occupation. Attaining these collective rights and political self-determination through self-government is perceived as the key to aboriginal sovereignty (Fleras 1990). The concepts themselves are virtually synonymous. Decentralized governance models are more adaptive than a central regional manager as they can evolve in accordance

with local needs and regional aspirations. Being in the immediate vicinity allows any changes and impacts that may adversely affect total capital to be recognized quickly and altered (Tyson 1999). For these reasons local communities would make excellent monitors (Mathias 1995) and agents to enforce compliance with grassroots developed regulations. When communities place importance on sustainable development, “they are likely to develop effective institutions that facilitate well-designed property rights and rules, and are likely to enforce those rules and regulations for the overall community” (Pagdee et al. 2006). It may be possible to establish the sustainable relationships and balance between natural capital and community development today, however there is also evidence that aboriginal communities face significant barriers to renewing this way of life in a modern setting. Brandon (1998), Kramer et al.(1997), Peres (1994), Redford and Stearman (1993), and Terborgh (1999) all argue that people unavoidably destroy and alter the ecological function of their environment and exist in opposition to conservation. Fientrenie et al (2010) also discuss how market induced pressures can result in degradation of natural capital for economic profits which seems to be a problem for many human cultures.

Communities must focus on finding a balance between the removal and the renewal of capital on the basis of years, lifetimes and generations. The incentive for conservation should be obvious as they depend upon it such a variety of ways. Therefore the relationship must be positive in the long term interests of the people. To justify degradation of capital there must be a gain in a number of other aspects, which can be achieved through re-investment in the community, by the community.

As an important part of natural capital, forests provide can provide economic opportunities through the sale of wood fibre, non-timber forest products (McLain and Jones 2002, Arnold and Pérez (2001), payment for ecosystem services (Kumar & Muradian 2011) and ecotourism (Fennell 2008). Aboriginal communities often build up an extensive knowledge of the complex ecosystems around them through inter-generational accumulation and practice sustainable resource management (Smith and Wishnie 2000, Koenig et al 2011, Corsiglea 2006). Under local direction, community forestry can use human, cultural and natural capital to build on financial, social and physical capital. According to the National Forest Foundation (2006), “the aim of community-based forestry is to empower those who work, live, and recreate in the woods to organize and strive toward a common set of goals.” I believe that using a combination of diverse community forestry initiatives can be an effective way to develop and strengthen all forms of community capital in a modern setting.

Ecotourism

Ecotourism is an emerging sector within the tourism industry, and as a relatively new concept, definitions have varied across the literature and in popular culture. The International Ecotourism Society, an organization dedicated to promoting ecotourism and environmental education, has defined ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people” (TIES, 1990).

In general, tourism revenue cannot bring in profits on the same scale as extractive industries such as forestry, mining, or industrial agriculture. However, in situations where we want to conserve other forest values tourism can provide local peoples with a source of income and an explicit incentive to maintain the integrity of the forest. Ecotourism is a fast growing sector of the larger tourism industry, which already accounts for 10% of GDP globally and has been growing 20-34% per year since 1990 (TIES, 2005). It seems clear that consumers are increasingly willing to pay for an environmentally responsible and educational experience. Thus, aboriginal communities have an opportunity increase financial capital while practising and sharing their rich cultural capital with the world. I believe that youth participation in ecotourism will increase their connection to past generations and aid in establishing a sense of pride in regards to heritage.

While ecotourism has been praised as an economic solution to problems of deforestation, poverty and habitat loss, others have criticized it for failing to truly meet conservation objectives (Redford & Stearman 1993). Overall, ecotourism has benefits and drawbacks for conservation initiatives, and must be implemented wisely to make a positive difference. As the sector is expected to grow greatly in the future, ecotourism can be considered both a threat and an opportunity for communities (Goodwin, 1995.) With an increased amount of visitors, the impact on the environment will also increase. The drive for profit could result in allowing people to “love it to death”. The trivialization of native culture also poses a threat to perception and health of the people. Therefore, keeping an ecotourism venture to an appropriate scale is imperative to protect the local First Nation.

One of the most positive examples of cultural evolution from British Columbia is the Haida Nation. They have successfully asserted their rights and title to the island of Haida Gwaii through persistent direct and legal action. They have established an agreement with Parks Canada that outlined the conservation of the natural and cultural capital of the Haida. Over time a relationship formed that was based on respect, reciprocity, empowerment and effective cooperation (Gladu et al 2003). The expression of the Haida Nation's cultural capital is represented in their beautiful art work as well as their hunting, fishing, and medicine gathering techniques. Coupled with the globally significant natural capital, this has created a diversification of the local economy. This has promoted new direction and employment opportunities for the Haida Nation which leads to the benefit of community capitals. Simply being recognized as stewards of the land creates a social pride and identity that runs throughout the nation. The cooperation between the government and a First Nation will hopefully set a precedent for future partnerships where trust will dictate effectiveness.

Non-Timber Forest Products

Most aboriginal communities utilize some form of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) derived from forest plants such as medicines or food. All Aboriginal communities utilize NTFPs, though most not in a commercial sense. With growing popularity of homoeopathic and traditional remedies in the marketplace, the development of a NTFP can prove to be a valuable revenue stream. However, if the demand for an NTFP quickly increases once it reaches the marketplace, the opportunity for over exploitation of a traditional resource for short term profits is often hard to resist. For this reason it is important to develop inventories and establish rules for sustainable harvesting. Cultivation, collection and processing of NTFPs requires the practice and transfer of specialized knowledge within the community, thereby strengthening capitals.

Ecosystem Services

First Nations must seize the opportunity to derive financial benefits through the conservation economy which consists of payment for ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration and water purification that are provided by intact natural capital. This concept shows potential to prioritize and protect important life supporting systems by attempting to assign a monetary value to them. It is

possible for the conservation values of the market/society to coincide with those of the community, in which case it makes sense to develop partnerships and strategies to provide mutual positive effects.

Timber-Based Enterprises

Considering that many First Nations communities are forest-dependent, a more important role in forest management may empower natives to pursue new business ventures and enterprises. In turn, this diversifies the forest economy, creating multiple products and benefits. Small scale timber-based enterprises have the ability to apply very specialized methods to suit specific sites and conditions (Bliss and Kelly 2008). There exists an opportunity for First Nations to develop value-added products and processes complimentary to their unique traditional ecological knowledge. These finished or semi-finished goods are a good way to increase the value of wood harvested per unit volume. This ensures an efficient transfer of natural capital into financial capital as well as creating social benefits through employment, etc.

Long term access through resolution of land claims and recognition of aboriginal rights has the possibility of promoting the conservation of biodiversity and other benefits to total community capital. With the declining profitability/price volatility in the forest sector (Hayter 1997) many large forest companies are being forced to downsize. Bombay (2010) theorizes that “the forest sector appears ripe for those First Nations that have acquired or are seeking forest tenures, or are managing forested land acquired through land claim settlements, treaty entitlement, or other means.” This increased political power resulting from decentralization will benefit sense of place, pride and belonging, thereby contributing to social capital.

The theoretical benefits of a well functioning community forestry model are numerous but implementation has proven to be difficult. The decentralization of resource management authority has been partial and disappointing according to Charnley and Poe (2007). It is difficult for this to occur in the current political environment as diversification may be interpreted as risky or inefficient when compared to the industrial model of extraction. Industrial models generally apply homogenous management schemes to large tracts of forested land in an effort increase efficiency. Due to the uncertainty in the short term, volume based tenures in BC harmful treatment of the land base seems inevitable. Many communities are in the process of negotiating land claims agreements but few have

been finalized.

Even once access to forest resources is gained, the capacity for the community to carry out tasks may be a limiting factor. Often the initial investment of financial capital to pursue a business venture is a challenge for aboriginal communities. This is especially true for the value added wood products sector in which specialized machines are often used to create a unique product efficiently. The same financial challenge exists for communities that must invest in legal aid to gain or defend rights. Modern management schemes require a high level of technical knowledge to develop and understand them. This includes planning documents, operations, inventories, monitoring, negotiation, etc. This issue is mainly addressed through the education of locals in a top-down transfer of knowledge or the hiring of outside professionals to assist the community. In my mind this can be counter to the ideals of sustainable development if the outside knowledge neglects or hinders the local attitudes and values.

Regardless of how financial capital or other benefits are derived from the land, it is important that they are shared to foster total community capital. Within a community people are internally differentiated by wealth, power, class, gender and ethnic identity making reaching a consensus on management decisions difficult (Arnold 2001). Lachapelle et al (2004) further states that factors similar to those put forth by Arnold (2001) also act as barriers to meaningful participation by all members of the community. If only the voices of the most powerful and influential members of the community are heard, the resulting situation is a unequal sharing of forest derived benefits manifested in the form of elite capture or small group profitability. These situations have a negative influence on social capital. As with any group of individuals with a vested interest but differing views, it may also be difficult to reach an agreement on a particular course of action.

The Diversity Approach to Development

By using the community capital framework to examine the health, stocks and current flows of capital available, First Nations can invest in activities that will develop a new future and way of life. If this is to be sustainable, diversity is the key component. Growth in any single area of capital, no matter how beneficial, will eventually cause collapse. A combination of ecotourism, forestry, non-timber forest products, payment for ecosystem services and value added products may be enough to stabilize an aboriginal community but it relies on secure access to healthy natural capital. Sustainable development

requires a continual evolution of strategy and direction with constant re-investment. Simply creating employment for aboriginal youth in their communities will make the choice of re-investing in their own culture and community a reality. Activities that create bonds between and within community social groups are valuable sources of inspiration to develop and design new ideas. Callaghan & Colton (2007) refer to these as “bridging activities.” Communities should also foster social capital and diversify their interests by entering into partnerships with other regional municipalities or supply chains.

Conclusion

Triumphalist histories are written by the victors, highlighting virtue and good things. The time of explorers and settlers are framed as epic adventures in which people arrive into an unknown, bountiful and unforgiving world and carve out a new civilization. This obscures history by only highlighting certain events, values and viewpoints of one culture which is over simplistic. First Nations are often written in as actors and not participants in this narrative. The effects of the continual destruction of aboriginal community capital through legislation and the residential school system has had lasting compounding negative effects on their culture and people. Discriminatory barriers must be removed to create an environment in which distinct First Nations culture and way of life are not dictated by outside sources but discovered and defined from within. It must evolve from the collective mindset of the individuals within the community. This may require a re-evaluation of governance, regulatory frameworks, legal boundaries and current societal paradigms but it will ensure the meaningful inclusion of community members' values, attitudes and ideals in moving forward towards a new sustainable future.

The aboriginal people of Canada have fought through incredible hardship to maintain distinct cultural and national identities throughout history, which is something to be proud of. I believe the time has come to forge a new prosperous way of life based upon their beliefs, heritage and traditions. To be able to make their own history is to be able to mould their own future, to build their society on the best of their past and traditions while enabling them to grow and develop as a whole people.

We need to conserve the traditional knowledge and ways of life of as many different communities of people as possible. I do not imply segregation and compartmentalization but rather diversity through cooperation and respect. I believe that there is no one right way to live and forcing

people to do so through any form, be it physical (war, genocide), mental (religious), or economic (capitalism) is a form of slavery and is very harmful to the world we live in. The diversity of how people decide to exist in the world is important to ensure the sustainability of communities and the planet.

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