

The Principles and Practices of Inuit Governance

Gary N. Wilson

Department of Political Science

University of Northern British Columbia

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Governance Defined

“Governance can be defined as the collective results from the exercise of authority and control through multiple governmental and other organizations, each following their own decision making processes. The concept of governance extends beyond government and the roles that government agencies play to include corporate and other private sector, non-governmental organizations.” (George Francis, quoted in McAllister, 2008)



Aboriginal Governance and Political Systems

“Indigenous political systems were and are complex structures of governance. By and large they were designed to fit with the realities of a people’s territory and to provide opportunities to make, interpret and enforce ‘laws’ in a manner that was consensual and inclusive.” (Ladner, 2006)



Aboriginal Governance and Traditional Knowledge

- Connection between Aboriginal governance and traditional knowledge, “[a] cumulative body of knowledge, practice and belief, evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living things (including humans) with one another and with the environment.” (Fikret Berkes, quoted in White, 2006)



Pre-Contact Inuit Governance

Pre-contact Inuit political culture

- Diversity of governance forms across the circumpolar region
- Rules based
- Attention to environmental stewardship



Territoriality and Belonging

- Clear sense of territory in which different sub groups exerted rights over customary hunting territories
- Although Inuit peoples did acknowledge similarities between them and other Inuit, “in the pre-contact period, there was no impetus for Inuit to think of themselves as a distinct people beyond relationships and practices that determined local affiliations.”
(Mitchell, 1996)



Leadership

- Differences in leadership styles and practices, depending on the group in question
- Temporal leadership was provided by *isumaitoq* (one who thinks)
- Spiritual leadership was provided *angakoq* (shaman)



Collectivism and Reciprocity

- Emphasis on the health and well-being of the collective; individuals subordinate to the interests of the collective
- “[R]eciprocity was a collective ideal rather than a contract among individuals.” (Henderson, 2007)



Impacts of Colonization

- European colonization introduced a whole new set of governance rules and structures, orchestrated by the state and its agents
- Inuit participation and representation in these governance structures was controlled by the state in a paternalistic manner



Impacts of Colonization

- Over time, the Inuit learned how use these structures to serve their own political ends
- Experience in Eskimo Councils, the Cooperative Movement and various national and international Inuit organizations, paved the way for self-government and greater recognition of Inuit rights and autonomy



Post-Colonial Governance

- Diversity of structures and practices
- Fusion of Inuit and western governance practices
- Emergence of innovative governance structures



Diversity of Structures and Practices

- Inuit are spread across 4 different countries in the circumpolar region
- In Canada, Inuit are further divided by the provincial and territorial jurisdictions in which they live
- Governance structure and practices are influenced by external boundaries and by internal interaction



Fusion of Inuit and Western Governance Practices

- Consensus Government (Nunavut)
- *Inuit Qaujimagajatuqangit* (IQ): “the Inuit way of doing things” (Nunavut IQ Task Force)
- *Pinngortitaq*: “to come into being” (Greenland) (Nuttall, 2008)
- Inuit economic and cultural development corporations (Nunavut, Nunavik, etc)
- Inuit Diplomacy: Inuit Circumpolar Council



Consensus Government

- The Territory of Nunavut, a largely Inuit region in Canadian Eastern Arctic, is in the process of grafting a consensus governance model onto a western parliamentary/ administrative system
- Representatives are elected as independents and political parties do not exist
- The Premier and cabinet, however, must maintain the support of the elected legislature



Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (IQ)

- “the Inuit way of doing things: the past, present and future knowledge, experience and values of Inuit society.” (Nunavut IQ Task Force, in Henderson, 2007)
- A series of general principles and values which are supposed to be embedded in the governance structures of Nunavut



Inuit Qaujimagajatuqangit (IQ)

- Special role of elders and Inuit organizations as facilitators of this process of “Inuitizing” the territorial government
- Challenges of incorporating Inuit principles and values into a western-based political and administrative governance model



Pinningortitaq: “to come into being”

- Acceptance that the world is constantly changing and that Inuit must respond to these changes
- Embodied in the Greenlandic response to climate change and the economic opportunities presented by climate change: “nothing is so bad that it is not good for something else” (Nuttall, 2008)



Inuit Economic and Cultural Development Corporations

- Inuit economic and cultural development corporations, such as the Makivik Corporation in Nunavik, bridge western and Inuit worlds by representing the financial interests of Inuit beneficiaries of land claims agreements and fostering the economic, social and cultural development of Nunavik



Inuit Diplomacy

- Inuit diplomats, like their indigenous counterparts across the circumpolar north, have played an important role in international bodies such as the Arctic Council and the United Nations
- Inuit diplomats are “rooted cosmopolitans” – skilled at operating in western international-diplomatic arenas, but firmly rooted in their traditional cultures and values



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Thank you

Comments? Questions?

